

# **My BraveNewWorld Essays: Vol. IV**

by

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## Lead Us Not Into Oblivion

Alton C. Thompson

Recent commentators on Americans—as opposed to older ones, such as [Alexis de Tocqueville](#)—have noted such characteristics as the following:

- They tend to always feel that they are deprived of something, but are never able to identify what it is that they are lacking. As a consequence, they never feel at ease, and always feel driven to be doing something (including smoking a [Marlboro](#)!).
- Despite feeling driven, they not only do not *recognize* that they have responsibilities, but *evade* the responsibilities that they clearly have, and *do* recognize.
- A part of the reason for this is that their relationships with others—all others, in fact, including family members—are *superficial*.
- Whatever the reasons behind their inability to develop close relationships with others, their feeling of being driven is what motivates their obsession with *technology*.<sup>[1]</sup>
- That obsession contributes further to their inability to relate to others on a deep level, thereby further contributing to their feeling of *aloneness*.
- That feeling of profound aloneness helps explain why most Americans are simply unable to think in *societal* terms; for most Americans one's *self* is the center of the world—the *only* important *location* in the world, in fact.
- This sort of mentality has as a corollary an interest only in the *present*.
- Insofar as Americans *do* think about the future, they tend to believe that the future will be much like the present, except that it will be more technologically “advanced” (meaning that they accept the concept of *progress*, in a certain limited sense).

When generalizing about a group of people (such as Americans [2]), one recognizes that members of that group do not form a homogeneous mass—one recognizes that considerable variation exists within the group. The *basis* for one's generalization, however, is that one perceives certain characteristics as being especially notable—if only in being especially *influential* (because associated with the society's leaders); and it is *those* characteristics that one perceives as *defining* the group in question.

Whether the characteristics listed above *are* defining ones for Americans is, to a degree, a matter of opinion—in that not all observers of our society would agree with the above list. I suspect, however, that the various comparable lists that people might compile would exhibit a high degree of overlap—both with themselves, and with the above list. And the important point for the present essay is that *I* believe that the above list characterizes the *dominant element*, at least, in our society rather well.

It will be noted, of the items on the above list, that *none* of them is complimentary! “In *my* book,” at least, I should add. What they all suggest is that *pathological* ideas and behaviors are the “norm” in this society. Insofar as *that’s* the case, the suggestion is that our various problems, as a society, are all rooted in pathology! The *society*, then, is in need of a “shrink” (i.e., a psychiatrist and/or psychologist)—so that the society can become (once again?[3]) a [sane society](#) (to allude to [Erich Fromm](#)’s 1955 book).

Although the society may be in *need* of a psychiatrist and/or psychologist, and a few individuals (such as Fromm) have attempted to *acquire* that role, such individuals have been handicapped in their inability to put the entire society “on the couch” before them. Thus, they have been forced into the next best option, that of writing books that give their diagnosis and plan for recovery, hoping that people read those books, and then follow the instructions therein given.

This “strategy” hasn’t worked, of course, because it *cannot* work. *Planned* change can occur in a society only if the society’s leaders provide the necessary leadership. But there are two problems with this “answer”:

- A society such as ours has a tremendous amount of *inertia*; forces are operating within the society that are pushing it in a certain direction, and even if leaders would *recognize* all of those forces—which is highly unlikely—and would want to change the society’s direction, they would have a difficult time doing so.
- They are unlikely to be even *interested* in changing the society’s course—for they probably aren’t even *aware* that it is on a certain course: Their thought processes tend to be tinged with ideology, so that there is a serious “disconnect” between their thoughts and reality.

This is not good news! For what it suggests is that *planned* change in a *positive* direction is unlikely to occur. Given this, in conjunction with the current threat to our *species* posed by global warming, the suggestion is that the future holds two possibilities:

- Global warming will “do our species in”—or at least severely decimate the world’s population.

- Global warming will result in *unplanned* change in our society (and other societies as well, of course), to the point that societies—including ours, of course—will be collapsing within a matter of decades. This *unplanned* change will, though set in motion activities possibly (but not *certainly*) having a “salvific” intent.

Personally, I don’t expect global warming to entirely “wipe out” our species—although that’s certainly *conceivable*.<sup>[4]</sup> What I’m expecting, rather, is that as our society begins to break down, more and more people will begin to lose their attachment for the Existing Order, and thereby be willing to “experiment.” If *now* a New Society movement would get underway, such people would have a “home,” and the New Society movement could grow rapidly. Not rapidly enough to prevent huge losses of people, but enough to prevent the 90% culling (by 2060 CE) projected by British scientist Prof. [Kevin Anderson](#).

Indeed, I suspect that if a New Society movement were to get underway soon, it would quickly attract some segments of our population—well *before* our society begins to collapse. One reason for my believing this is that here in Milwaukee a black woman—in handcuffs, and in the back seat of a police car—was beaten by the arresting (white) police officer. When the Police Chief learned about this incident, he (to his credit) fired the officer. The Police and Fire Commission, however, reinstated the officer—which caused a near riot in the city. The Commission will be meeting today (December 11, 2012), to reconsider their decision, so that as of the time of this writing, I don’t know what the outcome will be.

The point that I wish to make here, though, is that there are many blacks here in Milwaukee (and elsewhere, of course) who are thoroughly “fed up” with the Existing Order, and likely would “jump” at the chance to be pioneers of a New Society movement. All that’s needed now, then, is for such a movement to get underway.

The reason that it’s so important to get such a movement started ASAP—before our society begins collapsing, that is—is that “design problems” would necessarily arise with the movement, and need to get solved, and the latter *could*, quite possibly, occur if the movement were not under pressure—if, that is, the society were not in the process of collapsing.

Once the society does begin to collapse, there *will* be tremendous pressure on any New Society movement then existing—if, that is, one exists! And if the movement’s “bugs” have been worked out by that time, it will be able to spread rapidly—thereby not only enabling the “salvation” of many, but enabling the provision, for them, of a decent way of life—if, that is, the movement has been properly planned (e.g., designed with people’s “design specifications” in mind; see Chapters 2 – 4 of my [eBook](#)).



If I had adequate financial resources and/or knew someone who did, and was able to convince them of the importance of a New Society movement (so that they would help finance it), I would not hesitate in initiating a New Society movement—even though I don't feel particularly qualified to do so. Not being in such a position, however, I am reduced to simply *writing* about the matter. That may, or may not, be sufficient—time will tell.

## Endnotes

1. An alternate explanation is that millennia ago male adults came to realize their inferior to females, because of the latter's ability to give birth. One of them, in sensing this, "hit" on the idea of developing an initiation ceremony, to be applied to youth, to "second birth" those youth—make them "born again." By giving themselves *their own* birthing function, they would make themselves equal to females. This worked for a long period of time, but at some point males lost their "second birthing" function, and again developed feelings of unease. It was then that one of them "hit" on the idea of developing implements of various sorts—which development led to developments in technology and science. Those developments were, in effect, "baby-making" ones, although no one was perceptive enough to recognize this fact. In effect, they were developed as substitutes for their earlier initiation-directing function—but their *consequences* have been so very different! Whereas initiation ceremonies pose no threat to earth's ecology, science and technology do, and have—and also have contributed a deterioration of relationships between people, not just males relative to females.
2. By "Americans" I am referring to citizens of the United States. I recognize that this use of "American" is chauvinistic—for citizens of Mexico, Costa Rica, Bolivia, Chile, etc., are also Americans. I suppose that "USans" would be a better term to use, but because that term is unfamiliar, I will use "Americans" here instead. Please forgive me!
3. My answer to this question is, "No, this society has *never* been a sane one, and has been drifting ever more into a deeper state of insanity!"
4. Economist [Paul Krugman](#) is concerned that "the robots and the robber barons [will] turn our society into something unrecognizable." Although I have great admiration for Krugman, he illustrates the problem associated with many specialists—he is unable to see the "big picture," and understand that global warming is what should *especially* concern us today.

[<http://bravenewworld.in/2012/12/31/the-holy-bible-reaching-a-surprising-conclusion/>]  
[<http://dissidentvoice.org/2012/12/reaching-a-surprising-conclusion-on-the-holy-bible/>]

## **Reaching a Surprising Conclusion**

Alton C. Thompson

We find ourselves in a curious situation regarding the Bible as we approach the end of the second millennium. On the one hand, we have access to more information *about* the Bible than at any previous period in history. On the other hand, [however,] there has never been a time when the Bible has had less influence in mainline Protestant churches, which has led one writer [1] to speak of “the strange silence of the Bible in the Church.”

In 1526 [William Tynsdale](#) made the New Testament available to anyone who could read English, an act considered so radical in its implications that Tynsdale would pay for it ten years later at the stake. Today the Bible is readily available to anyone who wants a copy, and most people do have one. But many seem not to know what to do with it:[2]

The author of these words—Schuyler Brown—was, at the time of the book’s publication (1998), Professor Emeritus at the University of St. Michael’s College in Toronto, and a Lecturer at the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland. The tradition from which he came—[Anglicanism](#)—is, he noted, (p. 23) “an anomaly in the spectrum of Christian denominationalism: a nonconfessional church. Not only does it have no *magisterium* or teaching authority; it possesses no confessional declaration comparable to the Augsburg Confession for Lutherans or the Westminster Confession for Presbyterians.”

I recently re-read this book by Brown (because “something said that I should”), thereby re-acquainting myself with the theme of the book, that (p. 137) “the way the Bible is studied in the modern world[,] it is incapable of delivering what people expect from reading the Bible, namely, ‘that the past becomes alive and illumines our present with new possibilities for personal and social transformation’” (this latter being a quotation from Walter Wink’s [The Bible in Human Transformation](#), 1973). He added (p. 137) that “as long as historical criticism remains ‘the only game in town,’ the hope that the Bible can function as an illuminative, transformative, and revelatory text will continue to fade.”

Note—relative to the ensuing discussion—that the views expressed here regarding the Bible seem to reflect the author’s Anglican heritage—its non-confessional nature in particular. I don’t mean this as a criticism of Brown, of course; I point it out only because, I believe, it helps one understand Brown’s perspective on the Bible.

As to what readers *expect* out of the Bible (among other points that he makes relative to the Bible), earlier Brown had stated:

1. Readers of the Bible seek to hear “the word of the Lord” addressing them out of the sacred text, as they wrestle with the challenges of daily life. (p. 36)
2. It is scripture’s ability to nourish the soul with present meaning which confirms its standing as a canonical text. (p. 36)
3. Bible reading leads not only to communicable insights[,] but also to a bliss which cannot be expressed in words. (p. 37)
4. It is the emotional energy released through Bible reading which serves to promote change, whether in the reader’s spiritual life, in the reader’s socioeconomic environment, or in the way in which the text itself is viewed. (p. 38)
5. When the purpose of reading scripture is personal transformation, it is not necessarily the most knowledgeable or ingenious interpretation which is prized. (p. 42)
6. The Bible can only become scripture when it takes on personal significance for the reader. (p. 47)
7. [Referring to a passage in William James’s [\*Varieties of Religious Experience\*](#) (1902), Brown notes that different people have different attitudes, and these differences] affect one’s experience in reading the Bible, particularly insofar as they predispose us to be attracted by certain passages and repelled by others. (p. 49)
8. An approach to the Bible through the thinking function may be counterproductive from a religious point of view. (p. 51)
9. The Bible confronts the reader with the same immediacy as Jesus’[s] preaching, and with the same exhortation: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Mark 43:9) (p. 59)
10. It is only the individual who *can* interpret the text. The quest for meaning is not a collective enterprise. (p. 60)
11. A foundational text like the Bible elicits countless new meanings, as it is read in ever-changing circumstances which its human authors could never have imagined. (p. 65)
12. The Christian faith holds out a promise of new life and personal transformation, and scripture has frequently served as the vehicle for such transformation . . . . (p. 85)

In summary (so far as the above points are concerned), Brown believed (in 1998 at least) that:

1. People (non-professionals, that is) read the Bible in search of answers to the challenges of their daily lives.
2. Bible reading can result in the achievement of a feeling of bliss.
3. It is to be expected that a given person will be attracted to certain Bible passages, but not to others.
4. Different readers will see different meanings in the Bible, and a given reader will see different meanings at different times.
5. Reading the Bible can illuminate the present—and thereby give one ideas (“revelations”) for personal (“new life”) and societal transformation.
6. The Bible has value for a person only insofar as it takes on personal significance for that person.
7. Given that only the *individual* can interpret the text, there is no value in meeting with others for a joint interpretative effort.

I am in substantial agreement with these points, but am led to make some additional points. First, I agree with the point that what’s of value in the Bible is what the *reader* regards as of value—not a theologian, pastor, bishop, etc. And I would agree that different people will find different things that “speak” to them in the Bible, and that the same can be said regarding a given person at different points in time (with the additional point that how one reacts to a given passage will depend on the *translation* that one is reading at the time).

A point that Brown fails to address, however, is whether certain *kinds* of passages in the Bible tend to be more *generally* attractive than others, with certain other kinds tending to be *generally* unattractive to most people. I would answer this question by asserting that, e.g., *genealogies* tend to be of interest to few, if any, and that the passages having most *general* attractiveness are those that present—indirectly, if not directly—guidance for how one should live one’s life. Brown, in referring to “the challenges of daily life,” *suggested* this point, but never emphasized it. Some such passages (e.g., those commanding one to stone to death certain transgressors) lack, appeal to us moderns, of course. But those passages that make or imply commands of a more “civilized” nature resonate, I would argue, with most readers.

Indeed, I would go so far as to assert that it is *only* such passages that resonate with the modern reader—which (presumed) fact has an extremely important implication:

**The Bible should be excised, in a [Thomas Jeffersonian manner](#), to remove all of the “extraneous” portions; and if it is a *useful* text that we are looking for, we should create one**

**using the excised Bible along with similar passages from *other* works—religious and otherwise.**

Doing so would, of course, put an end to the *need* for Christianity—but would not, of course, in itself put an end to Christianity. *That* would occur only if a new religion/philosophy were created that resembled Christianity in featuring regular meetings. This new religion/philosophy would not *need* to have a “sacred text” (e.g., of the sort referred to above), but *having* such a text might be a wise “move” for two reasons;

- It would help give the new religion/philosophy a distinctive identity.
- Because the new religion/philosophy would thereby *resemble* Christianity, its attractiveness to people dissatisfied with Christianity would increase.

Whether or not this new religion/philosophy (e.g., [NeWFism](#)) would adopt a “sacred text,” its “thrust” should, in my opinion, be ***helping its adherents become good neighbors and good citizens—of their communities, their regions, their states, their country, the world.***

Were this new religion/philosophy to adopt the aforementioned sort of “sacred text,” those who read it would likely find that *many*, if not *most*, of the passages in it “spoke” to, resonated with, them—there being, though, individual variation with this, of course. And although Brown, in referring to the Bible, stated that “The quest for meaning is not a collective enterprise,” I would assert, rather, that:

- If the new religion/philosophy were to develop and use the aforementioned sort of “sacred text,” I would expect that members would gain *both* from private reading and from discussions with others during their “church” meetings—discussions which might, or might not, make reference to that text.
- If the new religion/philosophy did *not* develop and use such a text, it is *discussions* that would be featured during “church” meetings—having the “thrust” specified above. (Other features would be added at the discretion of the members of a given “congregation.” In saying this, I imply—and do so intentionally!—that this new religion/philosophy should avoid the temptation of creating a hierarchical bureaucracy—that would likely take on a life of its own, thereby undermining the original intent established for the new religion/philosophy.)

Note that the “church” meetings to which I am referring would be very unlike the meetings associated with any of the current denominations of Christianity—including Quakerism. *That* fact might seem to make this new religion/philosophy unappealing. But if (a) Brown is right about *why* people read the Bible (“the challenges of daily life”), and if (b) many of those

currently associated with Christianity (such as me!) are dissatisfied with the religion, the prospects for this new religion/philosophy “taking off” would seem to be very substantial. (Those addicted to orthodox thinking would, of course, remain in Christianity—but would disappear from the planet as the society collapses as a result of global warming.)

As to how meetings should be conducted, I discuss this matter at length in my “[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#).”

## Endnotes

1. James D. Smart, [\*The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Church\*](#). Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970.
2. Schuyler Brown, [\*Text and Psyche: Experiencing Scripture Today\*](#). New York: Continuum, 1998.

## **Why Can't We Get Serious?!**

Alton C. Thompson

Tara Lohan (a senior editor at [www.Alternet.org](http://www.alternet.org)), in her recent “[5 Reasons Our Changing Climate is More Dangerous Than You Think](#),” begins her article with the following somber message:

We are part of a slowly enfolding tragedy in which the end of the world as we know it may be getting closer and closer. It won't happen on any particular day that we can pinpoint and there won't be a giant explosion or a big flood that will wipe everything away. There will be many floods and fires over many years. One species, one crop dying off after another.

This, she notes, is a more realistic way of perceiving the future than believing that “the world will come to an end” on [December 21](#). And she then goes on to list five reasons why a “changing climate” will be more of a problem than most people think.

Even before she began her listing of problems, however, I had problems with her article:

- “Climate change” itself is a misleading term—as I argued in my “[Trendular Atmospheric Depatternization](#)” essay several months ago. As I stated in that essay:

“climate change” is a misleading term. What the term *suggests* is that over time the lines on a climate map change in position, so that it can be said of a *given* location that it experiences “climate change.” The given location, that is, continues to *have* a climate, but at some point acquires a *different* one. This is not what's occurring, however, which is why “climate change” is a poor term to use for what's occurring. The fact of increasing variability is rendering the very concept of “climate” meaningless.

The point that I was trying to make in that passage is that *increased variability* in atmospheric conditions—and therefore *greater unpredictability*—is what is to be expected in the future, with that unpredictability itself *growing* over time. *Adapting* to that growing unpredictability will, of course, increasingly become a problem.

- She refers to floods, fires, and species extinction, but fails to mention the prediction made by British scientist Prof. Kevin Anderson (an advisor to the British government on climate matters) that the global mean temperature is likely to increase by 4° C. by 2060 (with which the World Bank's recent report basically concurs—see p. xiii in the [report](#)) and that [90% of the world's population](#) is likely to have been culled, by “climate change,” by that date.

- Bill McKibben [noted](#) recently that “computer models calculate that even if we stopped increasing CO<sub>2</sub> now, the temperature would likely still rise another 0.8 degrees [Celsius], as previously released carbon continues to overheat the atmosphere.” Given (a) the concerns of climate scientists with the prospect of there being a “[tipping point](#),” (b) it is widely held, by climate scientists that that tipping point would be reached with a 2° C. increase in the global mean temperature, and (c) the increase so far has been about 0.8° C., the only way to avoid reaching, and crossing, that tipping point would be for a cessation of carbon emissions *immediately*. That is unlikely to occur—obviously. Therefore, the tipping point *is* likely to be reached and crossed; and because even our best efforts to halt further warming are likely to fail, an *acceleration* in change is likely to occur (as negative feedback mechanisms are replaced with positive such mechanisms)—so that an increase of 4° C. by 2060 is highly likely, and Anderson’s prediction of a 90% culling of the world’s population is highly plausible.

You can read Lohan’s list of “dangers” if you wish; my point here, however, is that the problem of “climate change” will be far more of a problem than she suggests. I may turn out to be wrong in making that assertion—and I hope that I am!! But if we are to err in making predictions about the future, doesn’t it make most sense to err on the side of *caution*? Doesn’t it make most sense to assume the *worst*?

Near the beginning of her article, Lohan states:

*Here’s why world leaders failing to muster any meaningful action on climate change is downright treasonous:*

*Across two decades and thousands of pages of reports, the world’s most authoritative voice on climate science has consistently understated the rate and intensity of climate change and the danger those impacts represent, say a growing number of studies on the topic.*

*That’s Glenn Scherer [writing](#) for the Daily Climate. This “authoritative voice” is the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), put together by United Nations Environment Program and the World Meteorological Organization in 1988 and comprised of the work of thousands of scientists from all over the world.*

Lohan’s use of the word “treason” here might be regarded by some readers as irresponsible. But I am in full agreement with her point that the IPCC has been *overly conservative* in its predictions—proven by the fact that it has consistently *underpredicted* the changes that have been occurring. Where I disagree with Lohan is in her statement that “The prognosis for heading off this catastrophe [of floods, fires, etc.] is not great . . . but it’s also not impossible.” Which statement she then follows with the following:

We don’t need fear-mongering, but we do need a kick in the pants. And that’s a gross understatement. We need decisive action on a scale that we’ve yet to see materialize. There



are great things being done and wise words being written. [Osha Gray Davidson](#) has detailed Germany's rise as an renewable energy giant, and says that we can follow in its footsteps if we want. [Alex Steffen](#) believes cities will be the key to transforming our future and has presented a path for change. [Bill McKibben and 350.org](#) have led one campaign after another to raise consciousness, fight fossil fuel giants, stop dirty energy, and ignite action. Unless more of us join in their efforts and create new ones of our own, we'll be headed toward a disaster in which no amount of canned goods or personal bunkers will save us. Here are five scary reasons things may be about to get a whole lot worse. [Her discussion of those five things then follows.]

The efforts that she mentions in this paragraph are laudable, I will agree. My point, however, is that *none of them take the "climate change" that is occurring as seriously as it needs to be taken*. The fundamental problem with all of them is that they don't recognize the likelihood that we will soon be reaching and crossing the tipping point—and that when we do, *nothing that we do will halt further change*.

What does *that* very strong possibility suggest regarding what we should be doing—instead of the efforts mentioned in the above Lohan paragraph? Should we become survivalists—like [Nancy Lanza](#), mother of the killer in the recent tragic Connecticut massacre? My answer to this question is “No”—although I believe that some of the [expertise regarding survival](#) developed by people in this movement will prove of great value in the future.

The problem with the survivalists is that their orientation is too *individualistic*—they are interested in *their own* survival, as individuals and as families. The sort of movement that is needed, rather, is (as I have argued in many of my previous essays on this site) a *New Society* one—where the aim is not only to survive the ravages that “climate change” is likely to inflict on us, but to create a proper replacement for the rotten society of which we are now inmates.

The United States has a reputation of being peopled by “practical” individuals, but it when it comes to being practical about our *future*—as a society, as a species—we display a talent for putting our heads in the sand. Whether this is because our society is under elite control or some other factor, that fact remains—the irony being that the elite will suffer with everyone else when our society collapses within a few decades. Ralph Nader has argued that [only the super-rich can save us](#), but if he's right, then we are surely doomed—given that it is members of that group that are leading the way to oblivion.

Let us hope that some of those who are aware of where we're headed, and also recognize what needs to be done—and have the means to support such efforts—start the process of creating a New Society on these shores (and elsewhere, of course). Doing so will result in the “saving” of only *some* of our citizens, but given that that's the *best* that can be done, it will need to suffice.

## **Associations: What Does Exist, and What Should**

Alton C. Thompson

In an urban society, such as ours, one will typically find oneself being separated geographically from members of one's immediate family and from childhood friends. One will be able to maintain contact with such people by telephone and Skype®, etc., but such contact is not, of course, a substitute for direct personal contact.[1]

In one's new environment one will have neighbors, of course, but may be reluctant to establish relationships with them for a variety of reasons (e.g., they may become pests). One will have contact with fellow employees at one's work place, but this is a matter of necessity rather than choice. In addition, one would only feel comfortable associating with employees at the same level in the organizational hierarchy, and may lack an interest in associating with employees at the same level outside of work—because one does not like them, for one reason or another.

As a consequence of one's situation, one may feel isolated, lonely, and may hunger for some meaningful human contact. To satisfy that hunger, one may seek out one or more local *associations*[2]—a term that I am using here in a *generic* sense, recognizing that in the real world such organizations go under a variety of names, with some of them not even being organizations in a literal sense and, therefore, not having names.

Associations, so conceived, come in a number of different “shapes and sizes”:

- Some are very *formal*, with by-laws, regular meetings, dues for members, officers, etc., while others are very *informal* (such as gatherings at the local tavern). The latter sort of association may have “regulars” who meet to socialize over a beer and/or watch the Green Bay Packers play on television, but there is no membership *per se*, and if one begins to dislike some of the “regulars” for one reason or another, one can always shift one's patronage to a different local tavern. (Here in Milwaukee, with its heavily German and Polish population, it's not difficult to find a tavern!)
- Some associations meet indoors (religious groups meeting in churches), some meet mainly outdoors—e.g., hiking, camping, softball-playing, etc. groups.
- With some associations one meets indoors and as a *passive* participant primarily (e.g., churches), with others as an *active* one (e.g., a book discussion club).

- With some associations one may feel an obligation to join them (e.g., churches, where there are family pressures to become a member of a church of a particular denomination—which is one reason why the churches are so filled with hypocrites!), but with most one joins the association because one *wants* to.[3]
- Some associations are oriented to satisfying a *personal interest* (e.g., coin or stamp collecting, restoring old automobiles), others *self-improvement* (e.g., an exercise group, running club).
- Most associations are harmless, some are not (e.g., youth gangs).
- With some associations there is a “uniform” (e.g., youth gangs), but with most there is not.
- Some associations attract those interested in *performing*—plays, concerts, etc. Thus, members meet on a regular basis to practice and socialize, and on certain occasions put on plays, concerts, etc.
- Some associations are simultaneously communities—e.g., [“intentional” communities](#), [Amish](#) communities, etc. (I believe that the latter communities are growing more rapidly in Wisconsin than in any other state in the United States—most of them being in the western part of the state, some distance from Milwaukee.)

Although associations vary considerably in their purposes, etc., what they tend to have in common is an orientation to the immediate *present* or *near future*—they serve one’s need to cope, to interact with others, to develop/exhibit skills, to practice a religion, etc. Most, then, serve useful purposes, but there is a need at present that is not being met—but *could* be met (insofar as that’s *possible*, that is) by associations.

What I’m referring to here is the threat of global warming—a threat that is affecting us now, and will affect us even more decisively in the future. As I’ve indicated in many previous essays:

- It’s likely that it is now too late to halt further global warming—for we either have reached, and crossed, the “tipping point” relative to “climate change,” or soon will.
- Crossing this “tipping point” means that the *negative* feedback mechanisms that have so far been “fighting” change will be replaced with *positive* feedback mechanisms that will *accelerate* change.
- The change is such that most of the world’s population ([90%](#) per British scientist Prof. [Kevin Anderson](#)) is likely to be “wiped out.”

- Given the (presumed) fact that it is too late to halt further global warming, our only option now is that of trying to adapt to the changes that will inevitably occur—and even the taking of that option is unlikely to “save” many.

If members of the elite in this country, along with government officials, were aware of the above and/or willing to do something about it (i.e., pursue the adaptation option), Prof. Anderson’s prediction of a 90% culling of the world’s population could possibly be reduced to, say, 80%: It would be simply impossible to reduce it to zero, or anything close to zero—that is the grim truth that we must face. But many members of the elite receive their financial support from the energy industry (dominated by fossil fuel companies, of course), and whose interest in the future is limited to next quarter, and its “bottom line.” And the government is under control of the financial elite. Therefore, if any efforts are to be made to engage in adaptation efforts, they will need to be made by private citizens—acting either as individuals or as members of organizations.

If the adaptation option is to be pursued, this can occur on a “[survivalist](#)” basis or on a communitarian basis. As I have stated in previous essays, my preference is that the latter occur—because the first is excessively individualistic, and has no interest in preserving some semblance of civilized existence.

The [communitarian](#) approach would involve the creation of small communities (i.e., with populations no more than 500) designed to be located “safely” (with reference to global warming—e.g., away from coast lines), and as self-sufficient (in food production especially) as possible. In addition, they should be designed so as to provide, for their residents, a way of life as much in accord with human “design specifications” as possible (see, e.g., Chapters 2 – 4 of my [eBook](#)).

In planning such communities I recommend the use of a particular kind of association—the [New Word Fellowship](#) (NeWF, pp. 38 - 60), or its secular equivalent, the Structured Interaction Group (SIG, see my eBook, Chapter 8): The latter is simply a slightly-changed version of the first.

For any association to be created in the first place, common interests of some sort must exist. And for an association, once created, to “work” well, its members must be treated fairly—i.e., equally. A NeWF/SIG would be formed in the first place on the basis of common interests—in this case an interest in created communities having certain characteristics. And, once created, it is likely to “work” well because of the fairness that is “built into” its structure.

May either, or both, of these institutions come into being for the “salvific” purpose identified above. And once communities are created, I recommend retaining this institution for decision-making purposes or (in the case of the NeWF) religious purposes.

## Endnotes

1. If one's home/community environment was abusive, oppressive, etc., one may, though, *welcome* the freedom that moving away from that environment provides.
2. Associations may have first come on the scene around 2,000 years ago, and in the Mediterranean Basin. Burton L. Mack ([\*Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth\*](#), 1995) notes that these small social units arose within the larger urban environment of that time, and (p. 28) were referred to using such terms as fellowships (*koinonai*), festive companies (*thiasoi*), and clubs (*collegia*—from which our word “collegial” derives). Members of a given association—which was a *voluntary* organization—would be similar in terms of ethnicity, occupation, interests, etc.; and would usually meet on a monthly basis to share a meal (in mid-afternoon) and “invoke the patron mascot or deity, acknowledge the club symbols, conduct business, and spend the rest of the evening socializing.”

Given that many of the residents of urban areas were from “societies that had been destroyed,” associations often served as substitutes for those former societies. Unsurprisingly, then, associations often displayed signs and symbols of that former society, had meals based on the cuisine they were used to eating in the former society, and in other ways remembered life in the former society. Meetings were often held in the homes of association members, but “In the case of Jewish associations, at first called “houses of prayer” and later synagogues (from the Greek *synagoge*, gathering), buildings were actually constructed to serve as educational, religious, and social centers.”

Although associations were a part of the Larger Society, they (p. 29) “allowed for patterns of social intercourse that did not readily mesh with the social conventions of the society at large” — so that, e.g., associations provided women with “a semipublic arena beyond the confines of their traditional place in the home.” Thus, continues Mack, “the association should be seen as a very creative and important moment in the history of Western civilization. Its novelty was that a way had been found to sustain subcultural, or minority[,] groups within a large, diversified society[,] and to experiment with new ways to construct social units.”

As one might expect, “The Romans were not always comfortable with the existence of associations. And they did, on occasion, take steps to control[,] or even outlaw[,] them. But there was little they could do to contain the energies that people invested in this social experiment. The combination of concepts was just too attractive: free association, membership, self-governance, and cultivation of shared interests, having a name and a place, rules, symbols, signs of recognition, and so on. To think that a traditional culture could be kept alive by a small, intentional social unit in the diaspora was a very attractive idea.”

But not for everyone. For “many intellectuals, trying to preserve a cultural heritage in miniature was not an adequate response to the Greco-Roman age. They wanted to see the world as a whole. They wanted to see the many cultures fitting into some large design.” While living in their previous societies, people had tended to “see the world as a whole.” But now with the Roman Empire containing many *different* sorts of people, there was no consistency in how people saw the world, so that (p. 31) the question arose: “How to find the key that would make it possible to see the world whole again?” Thus, much of the thinking of “Egyptian priests,

Jewish sages, Syrian scribes, Greek philosophers, Hellenistic teachers, Roman historians” and others was devoted to this question—a question made possible in the first place by the diversity that existed in the Roman Empire. And as Mack notes, those involved in the emerging Christian movement were participants in that intellectual development—the associations that they created being places where such developments (among others) occurred.

Although Mack’s attention to associations was rather cursory, Philip A. Harland, e.g., has treated this matter at book length, in [\*Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society\*](#), 2003. As Harland notes (p. 8), his book “is concerned with assessing and comparing the place of diverse associations, synagogues, and assemblies within the framework of the Greek city, or polis, under Roman rule in Asia Minor”—his central argument being “that associations in Roman Asia, including some synagogues and assemblies, could in varying ways participate within certain areas of life in the polis under Roman rule, including involvement in imperial honors and connections. Associations were not, as often assumed, subversive groups in consistent [should be “constant”?] tension with polis and empire.” Of particular interest regarding this book is that (p. 16) “Archeological sources and methods are fundamental to this study.”

3. However, a *variety* of motives can be involved. For example, at one’s place of work one may be an insignificant “cog” in the organizational machine, and joining an association may give one an opportunity to become the “big cheese” in that association; may join a church because one has a good voice and wants to join the church’s choir; may join a club looking for a spouse; may join an association to make business contacts; etc.

## **Foolish Talk About “Sustainability”**

Alton C. Thompson

The title of Gar Alperovitz’s “[Beyond Super-Elites and Conspicuous Consumption: Real Ecological Sustainability in the Twenty-First Century](#)” (derived from his [America Beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming our Wealth, our Liberty, and our Democracy](#), 2005) seemingly asserts that sustainability is *possible* in this century. But *is* it? To answer this question, we must first specify what we mean by “[sustainability](#).”

In an [earlier essay](#) I asserted that “‘sustainability’ . . . is now an obsolete concept: It is a concept having a *resource* orientation that tacitly assumes that ‘climate change’ is not occurring.” Let me begin by expanding on that comment at this point.

In being a resource-oriented concept, the first point that needs to be made is that the term “resources” itself embodies a certain view of Nature—that Nature is not so be *appreciated* for its own sake, but only thought of for its *usefulness* to us humans (and *only* us humans). As such, it is a perception of Nature that is [antithetical](#) to that of [John Muir](#) (who spent his youth on a farm near Portage, Wisconsin)—founder of the Sierra Club, and “Father of the National Parks” in the United States. If Muir were alive today, he likely would blame our current ecological problem (among other problems) on our attitude toward nature. But that’s another matter.

Given that we tend to perceive Nature as a *storehouse* of “resources,” the important distinction that we make is that some resources are *renewable*, some *non-renewable*. The former are potentially *inexhaustible* in being living things. That is, the argument here is that if a given resource—such as wood—is used at a rate no higher than the *replacement* rate, “harvesting” of that resource can continue indefinitely.

In this case, humans would be analogous to predators who prey on members of other species—except that the tendency with the predator-prey relationship in Nature is for relative balance to be maintained, so that the populations of predators and their prey tend to remain relatively constant over time. In the case of humans, however, the tendency has been for “harvesting” at too great a rate (e.g., over-grazing), the consequence being not only the exhaustion of a given resource, but ecological damage to the areas within which the harvesting has been occurring—and also [societal collapse](#), perhaps.

*Non-renewable* resources are ones with a “fixed” amount in existence—although “fixedness” is a matter of technological capabilities, in that a resource that is too difficult to remove (because of depth under the ground) may become extractable at a later point in time, a resource that is not concentrated at one point in time may (because of technological “advances”) be economically



concentrated at a later point in time, deposits not known at one point in time may become discovered at a later point, etc.

With many non-renewable resources there is a change in *form*, so that although the resource is not renewable (except in geological time), the *use* of the resource does not involve using it up. In the case of other non-renewable resources, however, there *is* a “using up,” *fossil fuels* being a notable example. The matter of “using up” is not the only problem with a resource such as fossil fuels, however, for the *burning* of such fuels results in the transfer of carbon from below the earth’s surface to the atmosphere.

The problem involved with that transfer is that the increased presence of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere increases the “[greenhouse effect](#)” of the atmosphere. That is, it begins to result in the *emission* of more long-wave energy from the earth (as snow and ice disappear, leaving more bare land to absorb short-wave energy from the sun, and re-radiate it as long-wave heat energy into the atmosphere), and the subsequent “trapping” of more and more heat energy in the lower atmosphere—resulting not only in (a) an increase in the global mean temperature, but (b) an increase in the number of storms and in (c) their severity, and (d) an increase in the variability of atmospheric conditions at any given location (this increase itself varying geographically, however).

Swedish scientist [Svante Arrhenius](#) was one of the first scientists to recognize (in the late 1800s) this increased greenhouse effect, but he saw this as a positive development! Only at a much later point did scientists come to recognize that disturbances of the global ecosystem—whether by external factors or human-made causes (e.g., the burning of fossil fuels)—presents problems for that system—including us humans, for we are a part of that system, whether or not we are willing to *admit* that fact.

The concept of “sustainability,” however, tends to neglect this aspect of resource use—which is why I stated in my earlier essay (cited above) that it “is now an obsolete concept: It is a concept having a *resource* orientation that tacitly assumes that ‘climate change’ is not occurring.”

Alperovitz, in the above-cited article, states:

The overriding issue of ecological sustainability offers a final perspective on the problem of resource allocation, the need for new political-economic strategies, and the possibility of additional groups that might one day join in a realignment of U.S. politics around Pluralist Commonwealth themes. It also casts important light on how a number of initiatives might be combined to reinforce one another and to undergird a longer-term model of sustainable development if and when new political possibilities open up over the course of the century.

Although there is dispute about the precise dimensions of the problem, prudence alone suggests the importance of confronting basic ecological limits. The issue goes beyond



the narrow question of physical depletion of specific resources. A deeper problem is the system's finite capacity to deal with the secondary effects of our current mode of economic activity - what ecologists call "sink" problems. The earth's atmosphere simply cannot absorb infinite amounts of carbon dioxide produced by burning fossil fuels; its water systems cannot absorb the runoff of nitrate-based fertilizers used in modern food production without damage to the ecosystem.

Note that he assumes that sustainability is *possible*—but that in not recognizing that global warming has quite possibly “progressed” to the point that further warming may not only be inevitable, but may occur at an accelerating rate, it should be clear *why* I stated in my earlier essay that the very concept of “sustainability” is now obsolete: Our actions—inadvertent as they undoubtedly have been—have stressed Earth System to a point that the *negative* feedback mechanisms that *had* been maintaining relative stability for millions of years either have been, or soon will be, replaced with *positive* such mechanisms. At some point geo-engineering efforts may be engaged in to try to halt further warming, but as some scientists (e.g., [James Lovelock](#)) argue, such efforts are likely to fail. I would add that such efforts might even intensify the problem!

Alperovitz refers to the carbon “sink” problem—the fact that we have been pouring carbon dioxide into the atmosphere at a rate which exceeds the capacity of earth’s carbon “sinks” to absorb the excess, and it’s true that this *is* a problem. But much more of a problem is that we are either now in, or soon will be, a “runaway” situation with global warming—a situation of accelerated heating that we will not be able to halt.

Alperovitz doesn’t seem to “get” this last point. If he did, he would not be talking about “sustainability,” and instead would be recognizing that our current situation is such that our only option now is that of *adaptation*—with even *that* option not being capable of saving more than a few percent of those likely to be culled by global warming—90% by 2060, according to British scientist Prof. [Kevin Anderson](#).

Unfortunately, Alperovitz is not alone in not being sufficiently serious about the threat posed to us humans (to say nothing of other species) by global warming—a fact that gives one no reason to be optimistic about the future of our species!

## **Berman's List: An Examination**

Alton C. Thompson

“The crucial issue . . . is not what we ‘should’ do, but what is likely to happen.” So stated [Morris Berman](#) in his *Wandering God: A Study in Nomadic Spirituality* (2000, p. 217). He stated this immediately after presenting his list of our “needs” as a species—which would include those of us who live in that rotten, sick, corrupt, “war machine” society known as the United States of America (*my* words, not *his!*):

- “Sharp controls on population growth.”
- “More loving, somatic child-rearing practices.”
- “A more relaxed attitude towards death.”
- “Horizontal political arrangements, and the ability to see the will to power as an expression of insecurity.”
- “Greater gender equality.”
- “An immediate-return economy”[1]
- “The abandonment of religion and ideology.”

He continued: As “mass society and global civilization play their dramas out over the next millennium, the best we can probably hope for is some form of intelligent damage control and the occasional breakthrough.”

I suggest here, however, that **it is precisely *because we know now* “what is likely to happen” within the next 50 years that we *should* be thinking about what we should be doing at present.** Thus, after briefly commenting on that “should”—only brevity being needed, given that I have addressed this matter repeatedly in previous essays on this site—I comment on Berman’s list of “needs,” giving particular attention to the last one listed, the need for an “abandonment of religion and ideology.” Doing so will enable me to say more about the “religion” of John Muir than I did in “[Foolish Talk About ‘Sustainability.’](#)” and also to comment more generally on religion as it relates to the communitarian movement that I have been advocating in my essays.

A useful beginning point here is to note that I have (a) stated in previous essays that deaths are likely to occur on a massive scale within the next few decades because of the “progress” of global warming, and (b) noted that it’s likely now too late to halt that warming.

Let me try to state the first (presumed) likelihood in a more forceful manner—because of its extreme importance: Humans (Westerners in particular) began to use fossil fuels on a large scale beginning about 1750 CE. From then until now—i.e., over a period of about 260 years—the global mean temperature [increased about 0.8° C.](#); between now and 2060 (i.e., a period of about 50 years), however, the global mean temperature may very well increase (per a study done for the World Bank by the Potsdam Institute) by about 3.2° C—for a [total of 4° C.](#) since 1750. [2] **This is an increase of such magnitude, in such a short period of time, that no precedent exists for such change in the entire history of the planet!** It is no wonder, then, that Prof. Kevin Anderson (a British scientist who is an advisor to the British government) has predicted that [90% of the world’s population will be wiped out by 2060.](#) On the basis of that possibility alone, it should be obvious why I stated above that it is now too late to prevent further warming.[3]

It follows logically from the above (presumed) facts that our only choice now (besides suicide) is to engage in efforts having an *adaptive* intent. I have also asserted, in previous essays, that the best *form* for such efforts to take is the creation of small, relatively self-sufficient (in food production especially) communities—located geographically so as to avoid, so far as possible, the ravages that global warming is likely to be inflicting on us.

The question that I would like to raise here is: Were such an option to be taken, how would the “needs” that Berman listed in 2000 fare? What I will do here, then, is comment on each of Berman’s seven “needs”—giving particular attention (as I noted above) to the last of the seven “needs” listed by Berman.

#### “Sharp controls on population growth”

No attempts will be needed to control population growth—because the various phenomena associated with global warming will take care of that. As Prof. Kevin Anderson has stated, by 2060 there is likely to be an increase in the global mean temperature of 4° C. (since 1750 CE), and such an increase is likely to result in wiping out 90% of the world’s population by that time. The initiation of adaptive efforts, whether communitarian or otherwise, would likely reduce this percent somewhat, but it would be *simply impossible* to reduce the percent to 0.

#### “More loving, somatic child-rearing practices”

In my [eBook](#) I summarize (pp. 57 - 66) the findings of Jean Liedloff ([The Continuum Concept: In Search of Lost Happiness](#), 1975) that resulted from her personal observations of the Yequana in Venezuela. Her emphasis, in the book, was on the importance of the child-rearing practices of the members of that group. I am in full

agreement with her recommendations, and would urge those who take the communitarian option to study and implement those practices.

#### “A more relaxed attitude towards death”

In current societies the *nuclear family* tends to be the basic unit, and as I argued in a [previous essay](#), this is the cause of many of our problems. If the small community—a “family of families”—were the basic societal unit, I believe that many current problems would vanish—including the devastation that the death of loved ones can cause, because of the “built-in” support system that a small community (as I conceive it) would offer.

#### “Horizontal political arrangements”

Societies today tend to be highly inegalitarian, and a factor that *enables* (but does not cause) this to occur is *societal size*—the large population sizes of our societies. In a small community—with the right institutions—a relatively egalitarian situation can be created and maintained. An institution that I would suggest for this purpose is the Structured Interaction Group (SIG), discussed in Chapter 8 (“A Vehicle for Getting There,” pp. 159 – 164) in my eBook. Because that institution enables everyone to express their views and prevents domination of the discussion by a few, participation in that institution should help equalize power relations between individuals, and prevent anyone with a “will to power” from developing and exercising that will.

#### “Greater gender equality”

Any small community with which I would want to be associated would be egalitarian, not only in gender terms, but in sexual orientation, racial, ethnic, etc. terms. Again, for a small community to be, and continue to be, egalitarian, small size *per se* is not the sole answer—although small size is more *conducive* to an egalitarian situation than large size. In addition to small size, institutions such as the SIG must exist to ensure that the community becomes, and remains, egalitarian, not only in gender terms, but other ones as well.

#### “An immediate-return economy”

Given the situation that is beginning to exist (as a result of global warming), and assuming that a response to this situation is that of the creation of small communities, there will be a need for those communities to strive for near self-sufficiency—in food production especially. Agriculture (with, however, an emphasis on [raising food in greenhouses](#)—because on increasing variability in weather conditions) and the raising of fish (i.e., [aquaculture](#)) will need to be a part of this economy, along with some gathering and hunting. It will be essential, however, to preserve and store food items, given the variability in atmospheric conditions (and therefore unpredictability) that will be caused by global warming. This fact of a need for food preservation and storage should not present a problem for the maintenance of an egalitarian situation, however. My main point here, however, is that the terms “immediate-return economy” and “delayed-return economy” would be simply irrelevant as a descriptors for the sort of economy that would develop.

## “The abandonment of religion and ideology”

Religion and ideology have been divisive forces for most of “civilized” history, and a question that arises here is: **Would movement in a direction of small community existence result in the diminishment, or even removal, of those two divisive factors?**

Commenting briefly on the life of [John Muir](#) [1838 – 1913]—founder of the [Sierra Club](#), and “Father of the National Parks” system (in the United States and elsewhere—can, I believe, provide a helpful basis for addressing the above question.

A key to understanding Muir is the fact (expressed well by Alec Gilmore, in “[Biblical Wilderness and the Wild Places of the Earth](#)”) that “Muir was driven into the wilderness by religion—bad religion—the religion of a tyrannical father—and there in the wilderness (not unlike [the legendary] Moses who fled from the terror of wilderness, and many others, possibly including Jesus) Muir found a new faith.”[4]

Muir was born in Scotland, but while a youth, his family moved to the United States, to a farm near Portage, Wisconsin (not far from where I spent my own youth). Muir’s father was not only anything but a loving, caring man, but “had been converted at an early age to a particularly vicious brand of Presbyterianism . . .” John was forced to (among other things) memorize the Bible, and that exposure stayed with him for the rest of his life. But two other factors also strongly influenced his intellectual/spiritual development—a seemingly innate fascination that he developed early on with intricate machinery, and a thousand-mile walk that he took (in place of entering medical school) from Louisville, Kentucky, to the Gulf of Mexico.

This extended walk gave him an opportunity to observe Nature closely in some of its diversity, and that, combined with his fascination with intricate machinery, led him to the philosophical view that “When we try to pick out anything [in Nature] by itself, we find it hitched to everything in the universe.” Not only did Muir come to perceive the elements of Nature as interconnected, he came to perceive Nature—and mountains in particular—as *awesome*, *sublime*, and even *holy*, *sacred*; so that an attitude of *reverence* “naturally” arose in his mind as a result of his exposure to Nature. It follows from such an attitude toward Nature, that one who develops it would regard efforts to *dominate*, to mistreat, to exploit Nature as *abominable*—as *blasphemous*. As, therefore, actions that would be *unthinkable*.

Is it any wonder, then, given his life experiences (including his miserable youth), that he would write, at one point, “John the Baptist was not more eager to get all his fellow-sinners into the Jordan than I to baptize all of mine in the beauty of God’s mountains.” [5] For Muir, then, “God” was to be thought of primarily as the *Creator* of Nature—so that to desecrate Nature, was to express hatred of God’s Creation, and thereby hatred of God.

Muir had not learned that concept of God from his evil father but, rather, had learned it from his exposure to Wilderness—retaining, from his youth, only Biblical *language*, along with an interest in machinery, the latter helping him to perceive Nature as a set of interrelationships among the various phenomena comprising it.

Those who would choose the communitarian option (in responding to the threat of global warming) might, or might not, be individuals with attachments to Christianity (or Judaism, or other religions), and several questions arise here relative to that fact:

- Would they retain that attachment?
- Would some abandon that attachment for [NeWFism](#)?
- Would some move in a “Muirian” direction?
- Would some become “Muirian NeWFians”?
- Other possibilities?

Let me precede an attempt to address these questions with some general comments about religion. First, a religion *per se* is usually thought of as involving (a) belief in the *existence* of one or more deities ([Buddhism](#) perhaps being the most notable exception here), (b) beliefs regarding what that deity(ies) has done and/or currently does, (c) beliefs regarding what deity has commanded people to do, and (d) other human actions thought to be appropriate given the above sorts of beliefs.

Deity was evidently first conceived as a series of *forces* operating within or behind various elements of Nature, those forces later becoming *personified*—so that *polytheism* was born. For Westerners (such as myself), it is developments in Mesopotamia that have special relevance, a subject discussed, e.g., in Thorkild Jacobsen’s classic [The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion](#), 1976. In that book Jacobsen argued that the nature of religion evolved over time in that region, so that during the fourth millennium B.C.E, there was an emphasis (p. 21) on “worship of powers in natural and other phenomena essential for economic survival,” during the third millennium there was added “the concept of the ruler, and the hope of security against enemies,” during the second millennium “the fortunes of the individual increase in importance until they rival those of communal economy and security,” but then “a dark age closed down on Mesopotamia,” and there “was a corresponding coarsening and barbarization of the idea of divinity, no new overarching concepts arose, rather doubts and despair abounded.”

Monotheism developed in that part of the world, and seems to have developed initially in nomadic groups—which themselves were evidently formed by people who had “escaped”

civilized existence. What conduced the development of monotheism with such groups was the patriarchal social structure that they developed, along with the fact that the sun was the dominant element in their environment.

In the Hebrew Bible, God first appears on the scene as the Creator of the universe, but primarily plays the role of a Revealer in that book—“dictating” messages to individuals, specifically individuals who are temporarily isolated from their fellows, those messages providing instructions to the message’s recipient what that person should do or say (e.g., provide instructions, directly or via parables, to one’s fellows as to what *they* should, and should not, do).

Thus, when one thinks of the various “Old Testament” prophets and Jesus, one thinks of them as receiving (perhaps after *seeking*) revelations from God. In John’s gospel ([Chapters 14 – 16](#)), the reference to the promise of Jesus sending a “Helper” who will “teach you everything” (14:25) after his departure, can be construed as a continuation of this concept of deity.[6] Of Christian denominations that developed after Jesus’s departure, only the Quakers have taken this promise “to heart”—for the purpose of their religious meetings is to sit quietly and wait for God to reveal something to one or more in attendance.[7] Most Christians, however, (stupidly) perceive the Bible itself as containing all of God’s revelation—having been “hoodwinked” into accepting this belief by ministers, priests, and “religious” bureaucrats, i.e., people whose economic livelihood is gained by virtue of “laity” accepting this curious belief. I say “curious” because it is a view that has no Biblical basis—a fact that only the [Quakers](#), apparently, have had the intelligence to recognize.[8]

John Muir grew up with the Bible, but rather than developing a Quaker-like view of God, he came to perceive God as *Creator* only, evidently. This perception of God likely arose in response to his “immersion” in Nature—and as an individual (as opposed to an individual who was interacting with others) *while being immersed in Nature*.

If a communitarian movement were to get underway, it would develop away from urban areas, and one would expect (given John Muir’s experience, for example) that that new environment would have an impact on the participants in the movement—along with the thinking that they brought with them into the movement. Here is what I would expect to occur more specifically:

- Those who came into the movement with a strong commitment to one of the existing denominations would initially retain that commitment, but that it would gradually fade—in favor of a more “Muirian” perspective.
- Some might embrace NeWFism, but also move in a “Muirian” direction.



- Some would be secular, but would move somewhat in a “Muirian” direction.

Thus, although Berman asserted that we should rid ourselves of healing and ideology, and I believe that communitarianism does *not* provide an environment within which ideologies can thrive (so that whatever ideologies communitarians possessed, would quickly fade away), I believe that there would be a “mixed bag” with communitarians so far as religion is concerned (as the above assertions indicate).

I believe that living closer to Nature than they had before would have an impact on the perceptions, thoughts, values, and behavior of those taking the communitarian option, but that this would be an “evolutionary” process. During that process, the concept of deity might disappear—but also might not. If some of those communitarians adopted NeWFism as their religion, the fact that NeWFism creates no barriers means that there would be no *need* for that particular religion to disappear. In addition, I believe that NeWFians would come to perceive that their religion had such great *value*—for a variety of reasons—that they would not *want* to abandon it.

When Berman wrote that religion should be abandoned, he wasn’t aware of NeWFism—but it didn’t exist in 2000 (and *still* doesn’t exist!). Were he *aware* of NeWFism, he might adopt a different attitude toward religion—but *whether* he would or not is of little concern to me!

*Whether* a communitarian movement develops will depend on whether, of course, leadership arises, along with proper financial support. But *if* such a movement develops, I believe that it will attract some—and will not only increase their chances of survival (of the ravages of global warming), but, by bringing participants closer to Nature, will have important impacts on their perceptions, values—and behavior. Impacts which, I believe, will only be of a *positive* nature.

## Endnotes

1. Berman attributed (pp. 52 – 53) this concept to anthropologist James Woodburn, who had distinguished between “immediate-return” and “delayed-return” economies. (Roughly, the first type of society tends to be a gatherer-hunter one, the latter an agriculturally-based one.) “immediate-return systems reject the notion of a surplus.” “In such societies, even if you don’t participate in a particular hunt, you have the right to eat, and individual hunters have no future claims on those they feed.” “Delayed-return societies, which are based on the accumulation of surplus, inevitably lose their egalitarianism; there is a preferred status for those who arrange and manage the surplus for the rest of the tribe. Such systems also create dependency on specific persons so that one is caught up in a network of binding ties and corporate groups that can determine one’s survival.”



2. It is of interest that the “excess” of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere at present ensures that [an additional increase of 0.8° C.](#) will occur—even if the emission of carbon dioxide, methane, etc., into the atmosphere were to cease TODAY. I should add here that although the subtitle of the World Bank’s *Turn Down the Heat* is *Why a 4° C Warmer World Must be Avoided*, it should be clear that that is not possible. Given this, the World Bank is performing a disservice for us humans.
  
3. Berman’s reference to the “next millennia” above suggests that the phenomenon of global warming was not “on his radar” in 2000—despite the fact that the late [Barry Commoner](#), e.g., had already been writing about the subject for several decades.
  
4. Gilmore notes that the word “wilderness” occurs 245 times in (what Christians refer to as) the Old Testament, and 35 times in the New Testament. What the former fact suggests is that those who wrote and/or edited the books that comprise the Old Testament were either strongly influenced by their wilderness experience or by such experience by people they either knew or had heard about via oral tradition. Now if the “philosophy” and values expressed in the Old Testament had their basis in wilderness experience, this suggests, first, that as the *nature of the society changed* (e.g., became more hierarchical, urban, etc.) over time, it is not surprising that that religion would become distorted. So that when Eugene Linden stated ([Affluence and Discontent: The Anatomy of Consumer Societies](#), 1979, p. 81) that “modern Christianity and Judaism are utterly toothless as enforcers of good conduct in the earning of one’s livelihood,” the reason for this “toothlessness” is that Biblical values do not “mesh” with the requirements of living in a “modern” society. Given *that* conclusion, second, the implication is that we can *only* acquire that earlier “philosophy” and value system (and the *behavioral tendencies* implicit in them) by re-capturing the wilderness experience. Note that Gilmore refers to Muir’s “faith,” and thereby, I believe, distorts the nature of Muir’s spirituality—because the term “faith” implicitly “Christianizes” Muir’s philosophy to too great a degree. For further commentary on this, see the next endnote.

Gilmore’s reference to Jesus might suggest that the wilderness experience was important in the development of Jesus’s “philosophy.” There might be some truth in this—but we have so little “hard” evidence about his life, that we can only guess here—but I think it more plausible that Jesus was influenced by the Scripture to which he had been exposed (which owed much to the wilderness experience of his ancestors) in conjunction with how that Scripture was being interpreted at the time (i.e., given a “blame the victim” rather than “help the victim” interpretation). Jesus may very well have *sensed* Scripture’s wilderness background (without, however, being consciously aware of it), and this fact may have motivated him to himself have some wilderness experience. It seems clear, however, that most of his life was spent in contact with his fellow Hebrews—with, however, some limited contact with “foreigners” in Sepphoris (“that fabulous Hellenized city situated on a hill only a few miles from Nazareth,” Barrie Wilson, [How Jesus Became Christian](#), 2008, p. 67), Jerusalem, etc. An additional point to keep in mind here is that much that appears in the four canonical gospels was “lifted,” in whole or in part,

from the “Old Testament.” See, e.g., Leonard L. Thompson, [\*Introducing Biblical Literature: A More Fantastic Country\*](#), 1978.

5. Muir (per Gilmore) “saw every mountain as a cathedral, offering all the benefits of cathedrals made with hands and more besides.” I should add here that a criticism that I have of Gilmore’s article is that he is too intent on relating Muir’s “spirituality” to the Bible and Christianity. Given that Muir was raised in Christianity, it is not surprising that he often used Biblical *language*. But the distance that he had moved from Christianity makes those references seem more “Christian” than was his intent, I believe.
6. This later appearance, in the form of a “Helper” (i.e., Holy Spirit) can be thought of as a sort of “second coming”—as opposed to the *literal* “second coming” that some Christians are expecting to occur sometime in the future.
7. NeWfism is related to Quakerism in that NeWFians believe that revelations may occur during their meetings. However, it differs from Quakerism in that (a) revelations are thought of as occurring as a result, rather, of *interaction*, and (b) it’s believed that the consequences of interaction will be *manifold* (and all positive), with revelation being just one type of consequence.
8. It is especially Protestants, following the lead of [Martin Luther](#), who have regarded the Bible as the ultimate authority (*Sola scriptura*). In doing so, they have ignored the fact that in John’s gospel (the references to a “Helper”) they are in effect authorized to *ignore* the Bible as an authority! Catholics exhibit their own brand of stupidity in their claim of an unbroken chain of leadership from Peter to the current pope—for the Bible makes clear (in Acts) that Jesus was succeeded, after his departure, by one of his brothers, [James](#); and it is known from other sources that the leadership in Jerusalem was continued by members of Jesus’s family for a period after James’s death. (For example, [Eusebius, in his Ecclesiastical History](#), stated that Symeon, a cousin of Jesus, succeeded James. See Jeffrey J. Bütz, [The Brother of Jesus and the Lost Teachings of Christianity](#), 2005, p. 116.)

I would add that Christianity *per se* is a strange religion. It claims to use the Bible as its fundamental source of authority, but pays little heed to the behavioral suggestions contained in that book—preferring instead to divert attention *away from* those suggestions. Christianity’s purpose, rather, appears to be to provide employment for clergy and “religious” bureaucrats, and otherwise contribute to the maintenance of the Existing Order.

## Thoughts as a New Year Begins

Alton C. Thompson

There are two Big Ideas in the Christian Bible:

- The answer to the question ([Genesis 4:9](#))—"Am I my brother's keeper?"—is "Yes, most certainly!"
- Various factors operate in the real world that make it difficult for one to be one's "brother's keeper."

Ironically, though, Christianity has not only paid little heed to either of those two Ideas, but has invented any number of means to *divert one's attention away from* those Ideas! For that reason, there is very little reason to *continue* Christianity (!)—which is not to say, however, that the two Big Ideas listed above should be abandoned. Indeed, I would assert that these two Ideas are more important today than they have ever been.

Recognizing this "fact," what first needs to be pointed out is that neither Idea has a *definitive* meaning: Different people will—and should—interpret them differently, and the interpretations at one point of time are not necessarily appropriate at other points in time.

Regarding the first point, (what Christians refer to as) the Old Testament provides some specifics (see, e.g., pp. 17 – 21 of my [eBook](#)), as does the New Testament (e.g., [Matthew 25:31 – 46](#), [James 1:27](#)) And although the Old Testament does not specify *why* behaving decently is difficult, it *does* present a number of brilliant, innovative ideas regarding how to remember to so behave (see, e.g., pp. 21 – 27 in my eBook).

The New Testament, in contrast, provides (in Paul's letters—e.g., [Romans 7:21 – 25](#)) an *explanation* for why it is difficult to behave decently (Paul blamed our "human nature," although our "*socialized* nature" would be a more accurate explanation), and also provides a solution ([Galatians 5:16 – 26](#)) to the problem (Spirit-filling—the "Spirit" referred to as an "Advocate" ("Helper" in some translations) in [John's gospel, 14:26](#)). However, nowhere in the New Testament is any useful information provided regarding how one can *become* Spirit-filled.

I have recognized this latter problem with the New Testament, and have sought an answer to it—believing that the New Word Fellowship (NeWF; see Section B, p. 38 ff., in my ["Worship"](#)) *may* be the answer. I have also recognized, however, that although being "good" (to others) is the

Bible's *primary* message, our *current situation today* demands that another goal be added to that primary goal—that of human survival.

The threat of thermo-nuclear annihilation is still with us, but most of us are not in a position to address that problem in any meaningful way. To a much greater degree, however, are we in a position to address the other major threat to our existence, that complex set of phenomena that go under the label “global warming.” As I have written about that problem in many of my previous essays on this site, let me state here simply that:

- The global mean temperature increased by 0.8° C. in the 260 years between 1750 CE and today.
- It is expected to increase by about 3.2° C. between now and 2060 CE—an increase whose rapidity would be *unprecedented in the history of our planet*.
- The *primary* factors involved with global warming (increased global mean, number of storms, severity of storms, and variability in weather conditions), combined with the *secondary* factors (flooding, rise in sea level (and increased acidity of ocean water), fires, starvation, disease, violence) associated with global warming, are likely to have profound effects on human societies during the next 50 years (and beyond).
- It's likely too late to halt further global warming—and even if we had stopped transferring “greenhouse” gases into the atmosphere *yesterday*, the global mean would likely increase by an additional 0.8° C.
- Because the “progress” of global warming probably cannot be halted, our only choice now is to *adapt*, as best we can, to the ravages that global warming is likely to inflict on our species (to say nothing of other species).
- Despite our best efforts to adapt, global warming is likely to wipe out most of the world's population—around 90% per Prof. Kevin Anderson (an advisor to the British government on climate matters).

Anderson's 90% figure is “just” a guess, of course; but it is a guess that we need to take seriously. *But it isn't* being—by either our leaders, or by private individuals/organizations. It might seem, therefore, that our future is hopeless, so that we could just as well simply wait for the “inevitable,” and allow ourselves to perish (including via suicide). But I, for one, am not willing to “throw in the towel”—for I have three children and four grandchildren.

As a consequence, I have been proposing, on this site, that in attempting to adapt, we create cooperative eco-communities designed to withstand (insofar as is possible) the growing intensity of global warming. I have created the Structured Interaction Group (SIG, see Chapter 8 in my eBook) as an institution for planning such communities, and “operating” them once created. I have argued—especially relative to the NeWF (an institution closely related to the SIG)—that participation in the SIG/NeWF can have a multitude of positive consequences for participants (see pp. 49 – 60 in “[Worship](#)”)—including (I would add now) generating ideas regarding how to cope with global warming. As I write these words on January 1, 2013, I am optimistic that a movement will soon be initiated to implement these, and other, ideas relative to our (partial) “salvation” as a species.

My hope is that such a movement gets underway within the next few months—and does so in a manner such that being one’s “brother’s keeper” will be as natural as breathing in the New Societies that emerge.

## Interrogating the Economy

Alton C. Thompson

An *economy*, as known currently, can be thought of as comprised of *activities*—both *production* activities (e.g., extraction, processing, storage, shipping, sales, business and personal services), and *consumption* activities (e.g., traveling to/from retail/service establishments, receiving a service, purchasing goods/services)—the activities involved satisfying both needs and wants. *Every* society has an economy, of course—because it *must*.

One can ask of any given *contemporary* economy various questions, including the following:

1. What percent of those employed are employers? Employees?
2. Are employees being compensated fairly?
3. Are the *needs* of all members of the society in question being met?
4. Is there a rational basis for the *wants* that exist with the society's members?
5. Do the economy's *production* activities involve pollution?
6. Do the economy's *consumption* activities involve pollution?
7. To what degree are the activities of a given member of a society *economic* activities relative to *other* types of activities?
8. Is the society's economy the society's *master*, or its *servant*?

Some of these questions are addressed by economists, who are also interested in such questions as how prices are set and how efficiently “resources” are being used. If, however, one regards questions 5, 6, and 8 as among the most important questions to ask of an economy *today*, one must admit that although some individual economists—such as Kenneth Boulding, Herman E. Daly, and Robert Heilbroner [1]—have exhibited interest in such questions, the *discipline* of Economics *per se* has not.

As a *discipline*, Economics:

- Tacitly assumes that the *setting* within which economic activities occur does not affect those activities, nor do those activities affect the setting—do not, e.g., cause global warming, with global warming, in turn, affecting human (and other life) . . . including, of

course, economic activities.

- Has a simplistic psychology that tacitly assumes that well-being results *only* from the consumption of goods and services; and that even the *performance* of economic activities has no effect—positive or negative—on the well-being of those who *perform* those activities, and/or are *affected* by those activities.

It is difficult to imagine an academic discipline with more intellectual limitations than Economics. Should we be surprised, then, that it is the *only* discipline for which a [Nobel prize](#) is awarded?! Not that being awarded a Nobel prize has much significance, however—an inference that one can reasonably draw given that President Barack O'Bomber was awarded the [Peace Prize](#) in 2009!

Still, some individual economists have been able to escape the intellectual box that imprisons most of their colleagues, an example being Herman E. Daly, who with theologian John B. Cobb, Jr., published [For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future](#) in 1989. For example, they state (p. 21) in that book:

The global system will change during the next forty years, because it will be physically forced to change. But if humanity waits until it is physically compelled to change, its options will be few indeed. None of them will be attractive. If it changes before it *has* to change, while it can still choose to change, it will not avoid suffering and crises, but it can be drawn through them by a realistic hope for a better world.

I quote this passage because it conveys a point of view close to the one that I have been presenting on this web site over the past few months. Writing 24 years after their book was published, I would, though, modify their remarks with the following comments:

- Their “40 years” referred to the period between 1989 and 2030; I agree that important changes have occurred during that time period, but would add that the changes will be even more rapid—and drastic—than these two gentlemen anticipated in 1989.
- It is now too late to halt those changes—and may even have been too late in 1989! Daly and Cobb did not raise this possibility.
- The changes likely to occur as a result of global warming are likely to result in the deaths of many, those deaths are likely to result in societal collapse here and elsewhere, and the collapse of societies will undoubtedly result in the *further* loss of human life. Prof. [Kevin Anderson](#) (an advisor to the British government) would add that it's likely that global warming is likely to wipe out 90% of the world's population by 2060 CE.
- Anticipating this eventuality—which Daly and Cobb gave no indication of anticipating in 1989—those of us living in 2013 must recognize that our *only* option now is to try to

adapt; and that even our *best efforts* in doing so are likely to result in the “salvation” of just a (relatively) few people.

- A communitarian movement would provide the best opportunity, not only to survive, but to retain some semblance of civilized existence—with the communities involved ensuring that their economy was their servant, *not* their master.

Interestingly, Daly and Cobb seem to have advocated some sort of communitarian movement in 1989, for they stated (p. 169):

We are concerned for small, intimate, interpersonal communities and would like to see an economy that enabled these to flourish.

They go on, however to note (p. 170) the “oppressive legalism, narrow interests, pressure for conformity, prejudices, and watchfulness” of “rural communities, small towns, or suburbs”—suggesting that they are unable to conceive small communities *lacking* those negative characteristics.

Given that both are academics, this is not surprising—for creative thinking tends to be a “scarce resource” with academics. Someone once compared academics to people sitting in the back of a moving carriage, observing what was behind them—and oblivious to the fact that the carriage they were in was headed for a cliff (but not necessarily a *fiscal* one!) The point of the analogy was that academics tend to observe the past, generalize about the past, and offer explanations that pertain to the past, but neglect to look into the future—perhaps because their skills are not suited for doing so.

One’s purpose in looking into the future is not merely to make educated guesses as to what will occur, of course, but to (a) make *value judgments* regarding one’s expectations, and (b) suggest plans of action insofar as one (1) believes that the future can be controlled to some degree, and believes (2) that control in a certain direction would be desirable. As most academics—those claiming to be “scientists,” in particular—operate in the world of “is” and “was,” and “will be” and “might be,” rather than the world of “ought,” it is unsurprising that they look into the future using such a perspective.

If, however, one looks into the future and makes “directional” suggestions, it is often not enough simply to project *existing institutions* into the future; there may be a need to invent *new* institutions—and that’s precisely what I (unlike Daly and Cobb) would suggest for future communities. Specifically, I suggest that any communities created adopt the Structured Interaction Group (SIG; see Chapter 8 in my [eBook](#)) as an institution for making decisions and interacting, and also adopt any other institutions that a community’s members believe will prevent “oppressive legalism,” etc., from developing.



Not only this; the members of a community should adopt an *experimental* attitude—by which I mean that they should (a) *value* creativity/inventiveness, (b) be willing to *try* new procedures, (c) be conscientious in evaluating them, and (d) avoid getting “stuck.” Above all, they must not allow their economy—for they *will* have one—become their master, the key to this being the adoption of institutions that will *inhibit* such a development.

When Daly and Cobb published their book in 1989, they *were* aware of global warming as a problem. At that time, however, climate scientists were not aware of the *magnitude* of the problem posed by this phenomenon (*set* of phenomena, actually)—so it’s understandable why Daly and Cobb gave the impression that the problem was solvable. Today, however, it’s clear that it’s too late to address that problem in any meaningful way—so that our only option is that of adapting—*trying* to adapt, I should add. May enough of our fellow humans come to this realization so that Anderson’s 90% figure will be reduced at least somewhat!

## Endnote

1. I would identify Sir [James Steuart](#) [1730 – 1780] as one of the older economists (*political* economist in his case) who had a broader perspective than is typical for economists. The same was true of [Adam Smith](#) [1723 – 1790]. As the Industrial Revolution—the time when humans, Westerners in particular—began transferring carbon to the atmosphere to a significant degree—was in its infancy when these two gentlemen were alive, the matter of global warming was on *no one’s* mind at that time. It was only in the latter part of the nineteenth century—with the work of [Svante Arrhenius](#) [1859 – 1927] that global warming was on anyone’s “mental map.”

## [An Exercise in Futility?](#)

Alton C. Thompson

A recent CommonDreams [article](#) opens by stating “As President Obama readies for his second term, environmentalists, climate change activists, and advocates for public health are not waiting to make their message to him loud and clear.” It went on: “In an [open letter](#) this week, more than 70 leaders representing groups with millions of members across the country told Obama that he must stand up boldly to address what they called the ‘great challenge of our time’: climate change caused by runaway carbon emissions.”

What did they propose that President O’Bomber do?

First, speak up.

Secondly, the signatories call on the president to use his existing executive authority to bypass Congress where appropriate, and say that one of the most important things he could do would be to aggressively enforce portions of the Clean Air Act.

And third, they demanded, is that Obama prove his knowledge of the dangerous realities of climate change by rejecting dirty oil projects like the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline from Canada. [The bad grammar here is in the original!]

Wow! Am I excited! Now, the rest of us can relax, because O’Bomber can’t afford to ignore these millions of sincere people—and before you know it, global warming will be a thing of the past.

What nonsense! If these 70 leaders were taking global warming seriously, they would know that the World Bank’s [recent report](#), done by the Potsdam Institute, states (p. xiii) that:

Without further commitments and action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the world is likely to warm by more than 3° C above the preindustrial climate. Even with the current mitigation commitments and pledges fully implemented, there is roughly a 20 percent likelihood of exceeding 4° C by 2100. If they are not met, a warming of 4° C could occur as early as the 2060s.

The key sentence here is the last one—that “a warming of 4° C could occur as early as the 2060s.” Although that Report states, on the following page, that

Warming of 4° C can still be avoided: numerous studies show that there are technically and economically feasible emissions pathways to hold warming likely below 2° C.

one should recognize that this is a rather naïve statement, for the mere *existence* of “technically and economically feasible emissions pathways to hold warming likely below 2° C” is no guarantee whatsoever that those pathways will be *followed*. Indeed, were I asked to state a probability value of their being followed, I would say that it is close to 0.00!

Why? On the one hand, because world leaders—the leaders in the United States being the best (i.e., the worst!) example—lack an interest in reducing emissions, being interested rather—and irrationally!—in next quarter’s “bottom line” (or their *sponsors*’ “bottom line,” in the case of our *political* “leaders”), not the *world* as it might be 30 years hence.

On the other hand, even if *all* of the world’s leaders were sincerely interested in turning their interest from fighting *literal* wars (and the killing of innocents that *they* involve) to fighting global warming, and were to make a concerted effort to reduce carbon emissions, the fact of the existing “inertia” would virtually guarantee an increase in the global mean temperature of at least 2° C—regarded by some scientists as the “[tipping point](#),” i.e., the point after which positive feedback mechanisms would begin to replace the negative feedback mechanisms that have been “fighting” change, resulting in an *acceleration* of change.

No one knows for certain, of course, what (in terms of degrees C of increase) the “tipping point” is. My position, however, has long been that it is safest to assume that we have *already crossed* the tipping point—so that it is now too late to halt further global warming; and that geo-engineering efforts to halt global warming might not only fail, but might exacerbate our problems in ways that we cannot even imagine now.

Now if one—such as myself—believes that it is safest to assume that “runaway” is in our future, and one has some degree of rationality, one will recognize that one has an important *duty*: To “propagandize” in favor of the *adaptation option* and, if possible, to *act* on that option.

I have no idea why the “70 leaders” referred to above are unable to see this. Are they so attached to the Existing Order that their unconscious minds will suppress from consciousness any proposals that represent a threat to the Existing Order—and their comfortable way of life in that Order? Who can say for sure? But the fact that our leaders in this matter of climate change are leading us in the wrong direction is an unfortunate fact—to put it mildly!

## [Going Down the Wrong Path](#)

Alton C. Thompson

Lynn Lau, in her recent “[Why This Ecowarrior is Retiring](#),” began with these words:

Environmental movement, this is goodbye. For the past 21 years, I have been greening, proselytizing and otherwise straining to Save the Planet.

Environmentalists who inspired me have burned out, become reclusive or even committed suicide. Little wonder: It’s a thankless, deeply depressing affliction to care about the environment.

I suppose that “caring about the environment” is a “good thing” to do; and it’s certainly true that “the planet is in much worse condition now than 50 years ago, when Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*.” But if “caring about the environment” means doing what one can to stave off further global warming, one must admit that this is no longer possible. It may have been possible 50 years ago, when [Barry Commoner](#) began issuing his warnings. But Commoner and other environmentalists have been ignored over the years by our leaders—especially here in the United States; and as a consequence, it’s likely that we are now in the early stages of “runaway,” i.e., a period when the negative feedback mechanisms that had been “trying” to maintain relative stability, are giving way to positive such mechanisms, whose “task” is to accelerate change.

What *that* possibility suggests is that the environmental movement no longer has a “mission.” *That* fact does not, however, mean that we should follow Lau’s lead:

If this is a sinking ship we’re on, I’m going to quit bailing for now, and take a seat on deck to enjoy the view.

If one is a rational human being aware of the possibility that we are in the early stages of “runaway,” I can understand why one would want to “quit bailing.” But why does it follow from the fact of quitting bailing that one should “take a seat on deck to enjoy the view”?

Just because one set of tasks is now pointless, why does that mean that there is now no set of tasks that *would be* meaningful? I fail to follow Lau’s logic here!

What seems reasonable for ex-environmentalists such as Lau to do now is to recognize that “taking a seat on deck” is an irresponsible action and that the time, now, is to *shift direction* and start engaging in a new set of tasks.

What tasks? Tasks related to trying to save some sort of “remnant” of the human population, at least, by engaging in *adaptive* activities. As I have written (endlessly, it seems!) about this matter in previous essays on this site, I will close here by simply referring the interested reader to those essays.

## **More From Berman**

Alton C. Thompson

Morris Berman closes a [recent essay](#) with these words:

We will not escape the ravages of climate change; we shall not avoid the economic and ecological disasters that are integral to global capitalism; not be able to avert an oil crisis, an energy crisis, or a food and water crisis that will become extreme when the world population finally arrives at 10 or 11 billion, by mid-century. These things are not going to be resolved by reason, by the neocortex, no matter how many articles are published on these subjects in learned journals or popular magazines. And they certainly can't be resolved by the limbic brain, whose function is indulgence, not restraint. Hence, it is a fair guess that we shall start doing things differently only when there is no other choice; and even then, we shall undoubtedly cast our efforts in the form of a shiny new and improved hula hoop, the belief system that will finally be the true one, after all of those false starts; the one we should have been following all along. What to call it? Catastrophism, perhaps. You can consider this the founding document.

Earlier, Berman had stated:

In [John] Gray's view [expressed in [Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia](#), 2008], the modern "secular fundamentalisms"—Jacobinism, Bolshevism, Fascism, and most recently, globalization—followed directly from this transformation. The result has been satanic—a black or inverted mass (i.e., one recited backwards)—in that these pseudo-religions have all caused a world of harm. The one idea common to all of them is that progress and perfectibility are within our grasp, and can be attained through an historical process whereby true knowledge will defeat ignorance (evil). Thus the world, and our psyches, are saved, no less in the modern secular world than they were claimed to be in the medieval Christian one, because history itself is imbued with Meaning.

And:

once globalization and neoliberalism are finally exposed for what they are, and take their proper place on the scrap heap of history, it will hardly be the case that we shall abandon notions of progress, utopia, and Meaning in history. Not a chance. We in the West will have to find another hula hoop, another pet rock, because as a Christian civilization we are simply unable to live without the myth of redemption. Hence, he [John Gray] concludes, the "cycle of order and anarchy will never end."

In reacting to Berman's comments on Gray's ideas I would first note that Berman states, on the one hand, that we "will not escape the ravages of climate change," but then asserts that the population of the world will be "10 or 11 billion, by mid-century." Evidently Berman is not aware of the fact that climate scientist Prof. Kevin Anderson would not only agree that we "will not escape the ravages of climate change," but would add that global warming will likely have

wiped out 90% of the world's population by that time—to that to talk about a population of “10 or 11 billion” then is simply foolish. (The current population of the world is about 7 billion.)

Berman's failure to recognize this point calls into question his claim that “We in the West will have to find another hula hoop, another pet rock, because as a Christian civilization we are simply unable to live without the myth of redemption”—for this claim tacitly assumes that such a “wiping out” will *not* occur.

Berman's “we” in the above sentence carries with it the tacit assumption that all of us (in the West, at least) have the same “mindset”—so that the “myth of redemption” to which he refers will always be with us. But will this *necessarily* be the case, given the likelihood that the world's population in 2050 will be much lower than it is now?

Assuming that an “Andersonian wiping out” occurs, it seems to me that a *process of selection* will be operating—such that those who are able to survive will, on average, have a mindset that differs somewhat from those victimized by global warming. Given this (strong, I would argue) possibility, I suspect that Berman's “myth of redemption” would be present to a much lesser degree with survivors than with non-survivors. Indeed, it might not be present at all in the minds of survivors!

The bigger point here, however, is that intellectuals such as Berman are contributing nothing to our survival as a species! He has written a number of heavily-referenced tomes, indicating that he has done a great deal of reading and thinking over the years. What he doesn't seem to realize, however, is that by not giving any attention to *how we should be responding* to the threat posed by global warming, he is unwittingly placing himself in the non-survivor category—i.e., is committing suicide, in effect, without even knowing it!

A professional writer writes to make a living; but by not squarely facing the threat being posed by global warming, he may find himself in a peculiar position—not being able to write, because he no longer exists!

## **Melton on the Recent World Bank Climate Report**

Alton C. Thompson

Engineer/environmentalist Bruce Melton begins a [recent essay](#) by stating:

As incredible as it sounds, the effects of climate change are worse than the World Bank Report says in its latest report: "Turn Down the Heat: Why a 4 degree C world Must be Avoided," a summary of the latest findings in [climate science](#). Much of this work is based on 1998 climate change scenarios and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change consensus position from 2007. Because science takes years and years to happen, a lot of this research is based on a world where Kyoto was still a part of the deal. But in our world today, instead of working on [climate pollution](#) emissions reductions, we are now emitting more than was imagined in the 1998 worst-case scenario. Even though much of the work in the World Bank Report is the latest and greatest, it is still largely based in research on one of the "middle-of-the-road" climate [change scenarios](#).

And adds later:

what will happen in reality is likely much worse than what the World Bank Report recites.

And although Melton presents an excellent discussion of recent research findings by climate scientists, emphasizing how serious a threat this poses to us humans (among other species), not wanting to be simply a "nay-sayer," he notes that:

Billionaires across the globe are investing in carbon capture and sequestration technologies to meet the climate change challenge. Outfits like SRI in California are looking to capitalize on the vast amount of money soon to be spent on cleaning up climate pollution by sucking CO2 [straight out](#) of the air. The future could be brighter than we think.

And he later adds that "the solutions will be no more difficult than supplying humanity with clean drinking water . . . ." He adds "The solutions to cleaning up climate pollution, using existing technologies, will cost about one percent of global gross domestic product (GDP) per year for 100 years. The astonishing thing to understand about this one percent of global GDP - this \$540 billion a year—is that it is little different from what we have spent on our efforts to provide safe drinking water [across the planet](#) every year for the last 100 years."

The problem with Melton's article, however, is that he devotes virtually all of it to the fact that things are worse than the World Bank's report suggests. He *claims* that the solutions are simple; but other than his brief reference to efforts being made on the sequestration front (relative to CO<sub>2</sub>) he has nothing else to offer. He makes no reference, for example, to the fact that methane is about 20 times more potent as a "greenhouse" gas than carbon dioxide—and that warming is



causing permafrost to thaw, thereby not only exposing more bare ground[1] to the sun's rays, but also releasing methane. What this latter fact suggests is that warming will soon be accelerating—and very likely doing so at a pace that our best efforts will be unable to slow or halt.

Melton may be correct in stating that “The solutions to cleaning up climate pollution, using existing technologies, will cost about one percent of global gross domestic product (GDP) per year for 100 years.” It appears, however, that by “climate pollution” Melton means only *carbon dioxide* pollution—so that he is ignoring the most potent greenhouse gas, a gas that will increasingly become the most important greenhouse gas.

In addition, even ignoring this point, Melton's claim that “cleaning up climate pollution” (of the carbon dioxide sort) will cost so little relative to GDP strikes me as politically naïve. Our leaders—in the business “community,” as well as political leaders (who are beholden to the former)—show little inclination to address this problem in any meaningful way. Given this fact, along with the likelihood that change will soon be occurring at an increasing rate, the only sensible course that I see on the horizon is that of trying to *adapt*, as best we can, to the changes that very likely will be occurring.

What I have been suggesting on these pages is *way of life* change, fully realizing that such a suggestion “goes against the grain” of the thinking of most in this society. People in our society are so “possessed”—and I use that term deliberately!—by the notion that science and technology will have the answers to all of our problems that it will be *impossible* to “falsify” Prof. Kevin Anderson's prediction that 90% of the world's population will be culled by global warming by the year 2060 CE. Whether one refers to this as a “mindset” or an “ideology”—or uses some other term for this phenomenon—it is a dangerous thing, and will result in the deaths of many unknowing, unsuspecting, innocent people—because actions that *could* be undertaken to save lives, *won't* be.

This is unfortunate, true, but there's nothing that I—or anyone else—can do to change this fact. Actions *can* be taken to “save” some, but there is no way to prevent the culling of most of the world's population.

## Endnote

1. Bare ground, unlike ground covered by snow or ice, will absorb, rather than reflect, incoming short-wave solar energy, and then re-radiate long-wave heat energy into the atmosphere—thereby contributing to the greenhouse effect.

## Seeing Red About Going Green

Alton C. Thompson

I suppose that I am a heretic of sorts in declaring that I am not only *not* a [Green](#), but am *anti-green*. There *are*, however, good reasons for my stance—reasons that especially those who attach the label “Green” to themselves should be able to appreciate. Let me begin my “defense” here by specifying my concept of being “Green.” The principal features, as I perceive them, of being a “Green” are that one:

- Strives to minimize one’s consumption of goods—for two reasons.
  - The production and transportation of most of what one consumes in our society today involves pollution—the emission of carbon dioxide being of especial importance. By minimizing one’s consumption, one also minimizes one’s “contribution” to that pollution.
  - Some of the raw material used to create products exist in finite quantities (recognizing that this is a somewhat elastic matter), so that by minimizing one’s consumption one is also minimizing one’s “contribution” to resource depletion.
- In moving from place to place (in a travel, rather than a migration, sense) one attempts to walk or ride a bicycle if possible, or use a bus if neither of those is possible—avoiding, so far as one can, the use of an automobile, even an electric one, given that the generation of electricity usually involves pollution.
- Tries to restrict one’s food purchases to certain types of foods (e.g., strives for a basically vegan diet), tries to purchase fresh (rather than, e.g., canned) foods that have been produced locally—and produces as much as one can of one’s own food.
- Proselytizes being “green” through speaking to others (both in private conversations and in speeches to groups), creates posters promoting “greenness,” etc.
- Uses the money that one saves from “living simply” to promote causes that one regards as important—including simply helping others meet their everyday needs.

Being “green” is not an easy matter, and I suspect that Robert Jensen speaks for many who are striving to be “green” when he says ([\*All My Bones Shake: Seeking a Progressive Path to the Prophetic Voice\*](#), 2009, p. 132:

[Deciding that “I was a happier and healthier person when I routinely rode a bicycle to work, . . . not buying things that people all around me clamor to buy, ” and related decisions] don’t get me off the hook. Although I don’t eat meat, I still eat dairy products, and I struggle daily with that decision; the honorable example set by a friend who is vegan reminds me of the question. Although I was able for many years to live without a car, a change in my personal life that led to a home further [*sic*; “farther” is correct here] from work means [that] I now commute in a car almost daily; a friend who walks virtually everywhere reminds me of how I fall short in this area. Although I stay away from the mall, I still eat out (a wasteful way to eat, given the way in which food is prepared and discarded in contemporary restaurants) more than is necessary; another friend who grows and cooks much of his own food reminds me of that failure of mine.

That is, although Jensen—and many others—*strive* to be green, they find it difficult to “go all the way”—and feel guilty about that failure.

Although I find it difficult to *not* admire those who strive to live a “green” existence, I need to note first that being “green” is an *individualistic* strategy—and thereby typifies a basic feature (*problem*, rather!) of American thinking.

As an *individualistic* strategy it is, second, a *lifestyle* strategy, and for that reason alone is doomed. In defending that assertion I need first to clarify the meaning of “lifestyle,” and the key point to make about *that* concept is that it *tacitly* takes the existing structure of the society as a “given”:

- A certain variety of economic firms exists—being of varying sizes, having different ownership structures, etc.
- Those firms offer a certain set of products and/or services for sale to the public.
- A certain housing stock exists, with those structures having certain characteristics and being distributed geographically in a certain manner.
- A certain transportation system exists, with its corollary of certain movement patterns—of both people and goods.
- In addition to economic activities, there are certain educational, religious, cultural, etc., institutions, and structures housing those institutions.

In short, the concept of “lifestyle” takes a certain *setting* as “given,” and then focuses on individual and family behaviors within that setting. The concept recognizes that individuals/families vary in income, and that this variation helps account for lifestyle differences in the society—in that the higher the income, the greater the variety of behavioral choices available. However, lifestyle is not just a function of income, but also a function of, e.g., the nature of one’s reference group ([Thorstein Veblen’s](#) concept of “conspicuous consumption coming into play here).

How do individuals/families vary in “lifestyle”?—given the restrictions identified above. They vary in:

- The kinds of foods they buy, how much food they purchase, how often they eat in restaurants, how much food they produce for their own use, etc.
- How much they spend on housing, whether they buy or rent, the type of housing they live in, etc.
- How they transport themselves, and how much they travel, and spend on travel.
- How they spend their “disposable” income—e.g., on cultural events, entertainment, sporting events, vacations, the purchase of goods/services, charitable contributions, etc.

Individuals and families vary, then, considerably in their lifestyles—although societal forces are at work that “push” people in a conformist direction. The basic question at hand here, however, is whether even *many* people changing their lifestyle in a green direction would impact global warming—would, that is, help *solve* the global warming problem. Jensen, in asking (p. 125) “What is a morally defensible level of consumption?” seems to suggest a positive answer to this question—as does the principle that he enunciates (p. 127): “Consume at a level that could be generalized to all people.”

Later, however, Jensen states (p. 129) that “larger-scale change is necessary,” and (p. 188) “systemic changes . . . are necessary.” What Jensen *seems* to be trying to say here—but is unable to—is that *lifestyle* change *per se* on the part of some is not the answer; that the answer, rather, is *way of life* change—a *societal*, rather than *individualistic*, concept. This means that rather than taking the “givens” listed earlier as simply “the way things are,” ***each of them must be regarded as subject to change***. And *such* change would constitute ***way of life change***.

As I have argued in previous essays on this site, societal system—i.e., way of life—change will likely be *forced* on us whether we want this or not [1]—for the various phenomena associated with global warming will, within a matter of decades, likely begin to (a) result in numerous

deaths, which (b) at some point will result in societal collapse, which, in turn, (c) will result in further culling—so that by 2060 CE (per Prof. [Kevin Anderson](#)) 90% of the world’s population may be wiped out.

Those who are currently making an effort to be “green” need to recognize these disturbing facts, and recognize that they imply that although there is no good answer to this problem, there *is* an answer that holds out at least some measure of promise—that of trying to *adapt*, as best we can, to the ravages that global warming will soon be inflicting on us; with the communitarian option—an option involving *way of life change*—being the one that I have been advocating.

### **Endnote**

1. As a consequence, President George H. W. Bush’s comment, in 1992, at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit that “[The American way of life is not negotiable](#)” strikes one, in 2013, as an incredibly ignorant statement.

## **Global Warming: A New—and Ominous—Wrinkle**

Alton C. Thompson

Until recently, I have “only” been disturbed by the following facts relative to global warming:

- The mass media have done little to publicize the severity of the threat posed to us humans by global warming; in fact, they have done little to publicize global warming, period.
- Most people go about their everyday lives giving the impression that they either are not aware that global warming is occurring; or are aware, but are not taking it seriously.
- A considerable number of people in our midst are *aware* of claims that global warming is occurring, but *deny* those claims.
- Some members of our society recognize that global warming is occurring, but are so “possessed” by market ideology that they are convinced that “the market”—being the answer to *all* of our problems—will also solve the global warming problem.
- Still others in our society are so fascinated with science and technology that they are convinced that there is a scientific/technological solution to the problem, such as [carbon sequestration](#)—thereby not recognizing that methane (which is 20 times more potent as a greenhouse gas as is carbon dioxide) will soon become the most important greenhouse gas.
- Those in our society who have acquired the label “Greens” seem convinced that “lifestyle” changes—such as minimizing one’s consumption, locomoting oneself by walking whenever possible, etc.—are the answer to the problem.

Insofar as solutions have been offered to the problem of global warming, my principal problem with them has been that they fail to recognize:

- How serious this problem is—especially the fact that global warming is likely to wipe out most of the world’s population within the next 50 years (and render many species extinct—species that we depend on, in one way or another).
- That it is now too late to halt the further “progress” of global warming.
- Given the above two (apparent) facts, our only option now is to try to *adapt*, as best—and as *quickly*—as we can, to the ravages that global warming is likely to inflict upon our species (among other species).

Instead of appropriate action, what we find today is:

- *Inaction* on the part of many—either because they are “deniers,” are ill-informed, or are “believers” who, though, have no idea how to respond to the problem, or are convinced that this is a problem for governments to address, and are hopeful that governments will address the problem in meaningful ways, or believe that “the market” will somehow solve the problem.
- *Actions*, but ones that do not address the problem in an *appropriate* manner, because of a failure to understand the nature and depth of the problem.

Some of those who recognize the threat posed by global warming, and are concerned by current inaction, are turning—unfortunately—in a disturbing direction, as suggested in this statement in a [recent article](#) by Cyril Mychalejko:

there is the [blog](#) Climate Code Red, which published "Scientists call for war on climate change, but who on earth is listening?" on December 7, 2012. The magazine *New Scientist*, in a November 2, 2012 [editorial](#): "The US military is a useful ally on climate change," it exclaimed. "Letting the military lead the way might be the best way to build a new energy economy." The editorial lauds the Pentagon's ability to generate research dollars, and as a result develop new markets for new technologies." Greens, too, should support the man oeuvre ... when you've got a war to fight, it helps to have the big boys on your side."

Fortunately, however, [Betsy Hartmann](#) and a few others are challenging this move, Ms. Hartmann having [stated](#), for example:

Instead of bolstering militarism we should be challenging it. After all, militaries themselves are top carbon guzzlers—the U.S. Department of Defence is the largest consumer of energy in the U.S., using as much as the entire nation of Sweden. Militarism also absorbs the economic resources and shrinks the democratic space we need to find real solutions to climate change.

Why be concerned that the military is taking an interest in global warming?

- It's like putting a fox in charge of the henhouse—in the sense that our military (as Ms. Hartmann notes) is the worst offender in being responsible for pollution.
- As Cyril Mychalejko points out (in a citation above), the military is “guided by maintaining US global hegemony and unfettered access to the world's resources, not empathy, human rights or environmental sustainability.” Thus, the military can be expected to work for the maintenance of its numerous bases throughout the world, and the well-being of its own personnel, with little thought to the well-being of anyone else.

- The military is not the home of democratic values—to make an extreme understatement!—its orientation being, rather, to domination and killing.
- Given the fact that the military’s interest is in “maintaining US global hegemony, doing so in part by protecting their military bases from the effects of global warming, an implication here is that people in the military are not fully cognizant of the fact that they occupy a *parasitic* relationship to the rest of the economy/society. That is, the military is a *dependent*, so far as the society is concerned, but a dependent that does not seem fully *aware* of that fact—and its implications.

What people in the military don’t seem to realize is that if the society *collapses*—as it is likely to do, within a few decades, as a result of global warming—the *military* will collapse along with the rest of the society—given that the military is not a *self-supporting entity* but, rather, is one that “feeds” off the rest of us.

Because of the military’s cluelessness regarding the fact of its dependence, along with its lack of recognition of the seriousness of the global warming problem, it’s likely that the military will “go down the wrong path” so far as global warming is concerned, and in the process ***contribute to our society’s collapse rather than to its salvation!***

The fact that the military’s “business” is *domination* and *killing*, rather than *helping*, people makes it likely that it will look after *its own* interests, rather than that of the general population. In doing so, however, the likelihood that its activities will *contribute* to the society’s collapse will probably to be recognized at some point in the early phases of our society’s collapse by military leaders—who will then *respond* to that situation.

But *how* the military responds is unlikely to please many of us non-military people. For rather than helping members of the general public *adapt*, it is likely to seize control of the country, and establish a military dictatorship—*forcing* people to provide its members with food and its other needs and wants.

In the process, those who *are* attempting to adapt to the changes being introduced by global warming—taking the communitarian and other options—may find themselves becoming slaves to the military. But such an effort—i.e., to control the population—is likely to end in failure, and rather quickly—with the *ultimate* result being either the extinction of our species, or a few survivors living a very crude existence.

Given these possibilities, the question arises: Does it even *make any sense* for those of us who would like to see the adaptation option taken, and are working for its advancement, to *continue* to work for this option?



My answer to this question is “yes”—but I am finding it difficult to have much enthusiasm for this option any more.

## **Does it Make Any Difference That There Are Deniers?**

Alton C. Thompson

The title of Clive Hamilton's "[Why We Resist the Truth About Climate Change](#)" [1] implies that the existence of "deniers" in our society is a problem—whether those deniers are political figures or "ordinary" citizens. This implication is more explicit in his statement that:

In the case of global warming it happens that the evidence overwhelmingly endorses the liberal beliefs that unrestrained capitalism is jeopardising future well-being, that comprehensive government intervention is needed, and that the environment movement was right all along.

What I perceive as implicit in this statement, along with Hamilton's title, are assumptions, on his part, that:

- It is *not* too late to halt the "progress" of global warming.
- The necessary "halting" must be accomplished by government leaders.
- The existence of deniers among those leaders inhibits progress toward that end, as does the presence of deniers in the general population who have influence over our political leaders.

Given these beliefs that I am attributing to Hamilton, the reason for his writing his paper (I surmise) is to try to put deniers in a "bad light," in the hope that their influence will diminish—thereby enabling governmental leaders to tackle the problem of global warming in a meaningful way.

Insofar as I have accurately delved into Hamilton's thinking here, I must admit that that I disagree with it. *My* basic assumptions are that:

- It is now too late to halt the further "progress" of global warming.
- Given that (presumed) fact, our only choice now is to try to adapt, as best we can, to the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us (Britain's Prof. Kevin Anderson having predicted that global warming will likely wipe out 90% of the world's population by 2060 CE).
- The likelihood of government providing adaptational leadership is extremely low (in fact, it won't occur!).

- Therefore, if adaptational efforts are to be undertaken, the leadership will need to come from private individuals/organizations.

What are the implications of this line of reasoning for the presence of deniers in our midst?

- Those who are deniers are unlikely to make any efforts to adapt, and as a consequence are likely to be the victims of global warming.
- Those who are *not* deniers, recognize that our only option now is trying to adapt, and then act on that belief, will have a higher probability of surviving than those who don't. However, even people in this group will have a low probability of surviving.

It appears that “you’re damned if you do, damned if you don’t” regarding taking the adaptation option, but the adaptation option at least provides a *higher* probability for survival than does the denier/non-adaption approach.

Human evolution has occurred in response to (a) environmental change, (b) predation, and (c) female-choice sexual selection—and *not* Darwinian “natural selection” (a concept that is not only scientifically worthless, but is an evil concept in that it provided an intellectual basis for Social Darwinism). A new factor may, however, soon enter the picture, as those who see the necessity for adaptation, and act on that conviction may be “selected” for survival over those who do not.

Hamilton may worry about the presence of deniers in our midst; I do not. I agree with Hamilton that those who denied Winston Churchill’s warnings about rising militarism in Germany were not only wrong, but represented a problem for humanity at that time. But global warming is “a different animal,” and I see no reason to worry about the presence of deniers, at present, in our society.

## Endnote

1. This was delivered as a paper at the Climate Controversies: Science and Politics conference at the Museum of Natural Sciences in Brussels, on October 28, 2010. Presumably, this paper is somewhat of a summary of Hamilton’s [\*Requiem for a Species: Why We Resist the Truth About Climate Change\*](#). New York: Earthscan, 2010—a book that I have not read (and likely never will).

## **The Bible's Stories: Their Nature and Value (if Any)**

Alton C. Thompson

The (Christian) Bible is a complex book, consisting of a variety of *genres*—e.g., collections of laws, wisdom sayings (i.e., proverbs), songs (i.e., psalms), narratives, parables, etc. The *genre* on the minds of most people, however, in thinking about the Bible is the *story*. Stories themselves fall into two main categories in the Bible—ones that are *descriptive*, on the one hand, and those that are *purposive*.

In a sense, *all* stories in the Bible are purposive, with *descriptive stories* having the purpose (apparently, at any rate) of presenting a descriptive narrative of past events; and *purposive stories* being stories (a) attributed to particular individuals who are (b) explicitly identified in a narration as (c) telling stories to others (either a single other, or a group of others), these stories (d) given the appearance of fictions, and (e) having a certain *intent* given to them by the storyteller.

These latter stories—usually referred to as *parables*—also differ from descriptive stories in presenting *puzzles* to the hearer (or reader, in the case of someone reading an account of a parable being told). Puzzles in two senses:

- What was the *speaker's intent* in telling the story to someone, or some group of people?
- What is the *meaning* the story?

For scholars, the stories of the Bible are “raw materials” for them to work with; they are taken as “givens,” and as such are to be studied (to death, the cynic might add!). Lay people, however, approach the stories of the Bible—all stories, for that matter—from a different perspective. For lay persons, there is only one question of relevance to ask of Biblical stories: What is their *value*? By which the person asking the question means, of course: What is their value *to me*? (If *any*, I would add.)

It should be obvious that if one is to answer the question of value properly, one should begin by first determining the *nature* of the Bible's stories—beyond the distinction made above.

Therefore, although my primary purpose here is to comment on the Bible's stories from the standpoint of their *value* (as *I* judge that value), I am obligated to begin here by developing, and then presenting, a classification of the Bible's stories. What follows, then, is my classification of the Bible's stories, followed by some explication of the categories identified. Following that explication, I discuss the categories from the standpoint of their value.

The categories that I identify are ones that have meaning to me—and therefore may, or may not, have meaning to others. Insofar as the latter is the case, others are invited to develop their own classifications of the Bible’s stories. Also, in offering comments on the *value* of the different types of stories in the Bible, I “merely” present my own *personal opinions* on those categories—and others are welcome to develop, and express, their own opinions on this matter.

Here, then, is my classification of the stories that appear in the Bible:

1. I. Descriptive stories (i.e., narratives)
  2. A. Having some historical basis
  3. B. Having no historical basis
    4. 1. Created for theological reasons.
    5. 2. Created to fill a narrative gap.
6. II. Purposive stories (i.e., parables)
  7. A. Reasons for telling:
    8. 1. If directed at a particular individual.
    9. 2. If directed at all (alleged) hearers (or readers of account)
      10. a. To convey (alleged) truths.
      11. b. To convey commands.
  12. B. Effects on hearers/readers
    13. 1. Stay in one’s memory.
    14. 2. Motivate interaction with other hearers (or readers).
      15. a. Interaction purposes/effects:
        16. 1) Developing relationships with those with whom interacting.
        17. 2) Development of creative ideas.
      18. a) Acted on by some individuals as individuals

19. b) Acted on by some individuals in concert with other individuals.

I will comment on the above categories by referring to those of the 19 numbered points (given to the left of the categories themselves) that relate to a *specific* point (so that, e.g., categories 1, 3, 6, etc., are, therefore, not commented upon below):

#### Category 2

Narratives in the Bible having some historical basis would include the gospel accounts of Jesus's life. The fact that a number of groups came into existence oriented to Jesus (see, e.g., Burton L. Mack's [Who Wrote the New Testament](#)) would seem to indicate that there *was* a historical personage with that name. However, little can be known for certain about Jesus, given the [lack of solid evidence](#) regarding his life and "ministry"—and the fact that each of the (canonical) gospels presents a different "picture" of Jesus. It's clear that much of the "biographical" material about Jesus that appears in the (canonical) gospels was "lifted" from (what Christians refer to as) the Old Testament, with some of it also strongly reflecting the [pagan Mysteries](#) that were popular at the time of Jesus's existence.

#### Category 4

The Biblical story of Israelites being in Egypt, and then making a miraculous Exodus has [no basis in historical fact](#). Presumably the story was created to give force to the laws said to have been delivered to the Israelites by God on [Mt. Sinai](#)—done by depicting that God as a powerful supernatural being. By claiming that the laws were given by a powerful God, the hope (one can assume) was that the laws would be more readily obeyed than if they were presented as "merely" man-made. The [Creation story](#) at the beginning of Genesis (actually, there are *two* stories!) also would appear to have been created to "prove" that God was all-powerful. (Note here, though, the paradox that if God is all-powerful, and wants people to behave in a certain way, why did he give them laws—which they might, or might not, follow; why didn't he simply *program* them to behave as he wanted them to?!)

#### Category 5

The stories of [Abraham](#), [Isaac](#), and [Jacob](#) may have been created to fill a narrative gap between the Creation account(s) and the Exodus account. That is, they may have been created for *literary* reasons—to give the ancient Hebrews a (fictional) history. [Story-telling](#) may have originated as entertainment, but as story-telling developed with a given group, it gave the group identity as a group, and contributed to group cohesion. Stories are also of value in that often current events have their counterparts in ancient stories (see [this](#) for an excellent example), which fact enriches both the old story and the current event.

## Category 8

A parable being directed at a *particular person* is illustrated well by this passage from [II Samuel](#):

12 The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup>The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, <sup>3</sup>but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

<sup>4</sup>“Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

<sup>5</sup>David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! <sup>6</sup>He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

<sup>7</sup>Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man!”

## Category 10

The “[parable of the sower](#)” attributed to Jesus would seem to be an example of a parable having the intent of conveying a truth:

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. <sup>2</sup>Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. <sup>3</sup>Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup>As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup>Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. <sup>8</sup>Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. <sup>9</sup>Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

This parable presents Jesus as an egotistical person who thinks of himself as overflowing with wisdom to convey to others—who, because of Jesus’s surpassing wisdom, had better pay attention! The “tone” of this parable suggests that it was put in Jesus’s mouth by the *writer*—or a later editor—of the book in question.

## Category 11

The famous [Good Samaritan parable](#) is an example of a parable whose story involves an explicit (in this case) command to those hearing (or reading) it:

<sup>25</sup>On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

<sup>26</sup>“What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?”

<sup>27</sup>He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’, and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

<sup>28</sup>“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup>But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

<sup>30</sup>In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

<sup>31</sup>A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup>So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup>But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. <sup>34</sup>He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. <sup>35</sup>The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

<sup>36</sup>“Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

<sup>37</sup>The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

In this parable, the command to love one’s neighbor is made explicit and is illustrated; in other parables a command is implicit. Note also, however, that the parable involves implicit criticism of the priest and Levite who “passed by on the other side.” That is, the parable presents two “religious” people as *unreligious*, and an unreligious (because non-Jewish) person as the only truly religious character in the story!

## Category 13

One effect of conveying information or commands by the use of parables is that stories stick in one’s mind more readily than does information/commands given in a more direct manner. Given that one who wishes to convey information/commands to someone else would obviously like that



information or those commands to be *remembered*—and followed, if commands—delivering information/commands via the use of parables is a clever means to use.

### Category 16

Whether the deliverer of a parable intends it or not, those who hear a parable (or read one in a group context) are likely to be motivated to discuss the parable with others who have heard/read it. This may be especially true of parables with a high “puzzlement quotient,” but even parables having an “obvious” message may motivate interaction with other hearers/readers—to enable one to check one’s own interpretation with those of others, in the hope that others will have insights into the parable that one missed. Assuming, that is, that one finds it exciting to learn a new perspective on things—is not “stuck in a rut” intellectually.

Interaction with others, if conducted in a civil manner, can develop into feelings of liking toward the others with whom one is interacting—with the possibility that one will develop a *generalized positive attitude* toward others. Given this possibility, if one’s intention in telling parables is to convey to listeners that they should love the neighbor, the fact of their interaction—induced by hearing parables—may have more effect in causing loving behavior relative to others than hearing the parables themselves! The clever parable-teller may recognize this possibility, and deliberately create and tell parables that *have* no meaning, knowing that such parables, because of their high “puzzlement quotients” will stimulate hearers to interact . . . and come to develop a generalized positive attitude toward others. Whether this was ever Jesus’s intent in telling parables is, of course, unknown.

### Categories 18 and 19

The interacting with others in discussing a parable can result in the generation of *original ideas* by one or more participants in the discussion. That, in turn, can result in *actions* having their basis in those original ideas—either actions undertaken as individuals acting by themselves, or actions undertaken jointly with others. Whether or not this occurs will depend, of course, both on the nature of the parable in question, as well as the characteristics of those hearing (or reading) it.

The question of interest for *today*—for, that is, those of us with other than scholarly interests—is: What stories in the Bible—if any of them!—have value today for us moderns. In providing an answer to this question, I would first note that *narratives* that convey some commands might have some value for us today (although many of them refer to a long-gone past, very unlike what we experience today), and that those Category 2 and 3 stories that offer parallels with recent events or situations thereby have some value. I’m thinking here, for example, of [John and Nancy](#)

[Jack Todd](#) who, in initiating the [New Alchemy Institute](#) several decades ago, gave the name “ark” to the bioshelters that they created—an obvious allusion to [Noah’s mythical ark](#). (See the Todds’ [From Eco-Cities to Living Machines: Principles of Ecological Design](#), 1994, for example.)

but that *parables*—whether they were actually told as claimed, or not—would have relatively more value. But even many of the parables would be expected to have had more value to people 2000 years ago than to those of us living now. Insofar as parables have value *now*, it may be less, I would suggest, for their *content* than for their ability to promote *interaction* with other hearers/readers!

There are problems with parable-telling, however:

- Most of those attributed to Jesus lack much relevance for today.
- Few today have the ability to *create* valuable parables—ones worth thinking about and/or discussing with others.
- Parables promote, if but subtly, the idea that *some* (the parable creator-teller) are more important than others. To a degree, that is, they promote a *leader-follower* sort of mentality—which mentality can grow into a monster (the *inverse* of what Jesus intended—whatever *that* was!—in his [mustard seed parable](#)).

My comments above might be interpreted as bordering on heretical—if not being outright heretical—by some readers, but I would remind readers that there are at least two perspectives that can be used in commenting on the Bible. What is perhaps the *traditional* view on this matter is that the Bible presents God’s revelations to humans, and is therefore *authoritative* for us humans—with that which is “authoritative” being defined as that which a “qualified” person or group (e.g., the Roman Catholic’s pope, or the governing body of some other denomination) *declares* to be the “correct” interpretation of any given passage in the Bible.

Another perspective on the Bible’s “authority,” however, is one championed by theologian Delwin Brown—the idea that one should take the Bible seriously, and allow it to “[author](#)” oneself—i.e. (if I am interpreting Brown correctly here), allow one’s reading and studying of the Bible to shape one’s thinking and behavior. With this interpretation there are as many “correct” interpretations of the Bible as there are individuals doing the interpreting—the hope here being, though, that one is sincerely *trying* to arrive at an interpretation that one finds meaningful, and is not simply searching Scripture to find support for one’s preconceived views.

Although I am not a Quaker (although I recently attended one of their meetings, and had also done so several decades ago), I suspect (but am only guessing here) that their view of the Bible

stems from the references to a “[paraclete](#)” in the gospel of John (14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7)—for example, the statement in [Chapter 14](#): “<sup>26</sup>But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things . . . .” That is, the Quakers believe in *current revelation*, and—ironically!—perhaps derive that belief from the Bible itself! Put another way, they may use the Bible as the basis for abandoning it!

I, too, believe in current revelation—and *do* derive that belief from John’s gospel in conjunction with some of Paul’s letters. In my case, however, rather than believing—as do the Quakers—that one should wait in silence until one feels that one has been “given” something (i.e., a revelation) to say, I believe that the path to revelations—and much more—is interaction with others in the context of a [New Word Fellowship](#) (NeWF). For a discussion of the manifold benefits that I expect from NeWF participation see pp. 50 – 60 in the paper (written under the name James B. Gray) to which a link is provided above.

Participants in a given NeWF may be from the Christian tradition, but the NeWF institution can be used by individuals from *any* religious background—including *none*, a point that I emphasize in my [NeWFism essay](#). A given NeWF participant might very well be strongly influenced in his/her thinking by some “holy” book—the Christian Bible, etc.—but only in an “authoring” sense, not an “authoritative” one.

*All* of us today are “in the same boat” in being faced with the threat posed by global warming. And although *most* of us are likely to be “wiped out” by global warming within a few decades (per, e.g., Prof. [Kevin Anderson](#)), those who survive are likely to be those who have anticipated this possibility, and engaged in *adaptive* efforts—engaging in their planning efforts via the NeWF.

## **“Twas the Night Before Doomsday**

Alton C. Thompson

Yes! That’s actually the title of a [poem](#) written by a Robert Hawkins. Hawkins is associated with the [American Preppers Network](#) (APN), and he has this to say about “prepping”:

The end of the World is not what Prepping is all about, (*at least with the APN*).

Preppers are . . . like *Scarlett O’Hara* in *Gone with the Wind*, defiantly claiming “*...tomorrow is another day!*” We are eternal optimists. It’s why we strive for self-reliance and self-sufficiency, so we CAN see the dawn of tomorrow.

As for the other prepper mantra, “[SHTF](#),” you’d be surprised to know that “SHTF” happens *all the time*, each day, and every day. “SHTF” is when you pay \$3.50 a gallon in gas for your car, or stand in line and pay more today for what you could buy yesterday. It’s opening up the pay envelope and finding a pink slip...THAT’S the real motivation to prepare to be as self-reliant and self-sufficient as you can be.

Another web site with information about “prepping” is <http://www.prepperwebsite.com/>, which primarily contains links to dozens of other web sites that might be of interest to preppers, such as one for [Christian homesteaders](#), [building an Ark](#), “[all about preppers](#),” [gun preparedness](#), a list of [edible insects](#), [natural wound care](#), etc., etc.

I was frankly surprised to discover all of these web sites, and I will admit that I have not studied them very thoroughly. I will also admit that I have mixed feelings about “prepping” (what was formerly called “[survivalism](#)”). It appears to me that whereas the “survivalists” of the past had as their main concern the possibility of a thermo-nuclear attack on the United States, so that their preparedness activities were oriented in that direction, today’s “preppers,” in contrast, seem not to emphasize that concern, being concerned, rather, with the possibility of societal collapse.

They seem to perceive our society as being in a state of decline, making it ever more difficult for lower-income people to have a decent standard of living, and they apparently perceive this process of decline as eventuating in societal collapse. They do not, however, seem to be very clear on the matter of specifically *what* factors will precipitate societal collapse. And what I find especially surprising—from my cursory examination of prepper writing—is that preppers don’t seem to have societal collapse because of *global warming* on their “mental maps.”

As one who *does* foresee that prospect—occurring within a few decades, because the global mean temperature is expected to increase by about 3.2° C. between now and 2060—I must admit that much of the information that preppers are gathering, and the knowledge that they are

creating, should be of great value to those of us who (a) foresee disaster ahead (resulting from the various primary and secondary phenomena associated with global warming), (b) are convinced that it is too late to halt further global warming, and, therefore, (c) believe that *adaptation* is the only option that we now have—but that (d) even those who engage in adaptation efforts are not guaranteed survival.

One problem with preppers is that in not preparing themselves for the disaster that is most *likely* to occur within a few decades—that of intensified global warming—they are not preparing themselves for *long-run* survival. The preparations that they are making—e.g., the stocking of food—will enable them to survive for a matter of months, and even for a few years perhaps, but will *not* prepare them—and their families—for survival “down the road.”

The second problem that I have with preppers is that most of them seem intent on following an *individualistic* path. Their interest seems to be solely in surviving as individuals and families—and apart from *other* individuals and families. Thus, even if preppers are able to survive the ravages of global warming—which seems unlikely—they will be living a crude and lonely life.

What I wish is that preppers would recognize is that the United States has a rich [“intentional community” past](#)—e.g., the Shakers, New Harmony, Economy, Zoar, etc.—and that this tradition is [still alive](#). Today’s preppers and “intentional community” folk need to join forces, so that:

- Prof. [Kevin Anderson’s](#) projection that global warming will wipe out 90% of the world’s population by 2060 will be falsified—somewhat, at least.
- Those who *do* survive the ravages of global warming will not have lost all of the “good things” that civilization has to offer. As I stated in my [“Why Would We NOT Want Our Society to Collapse?!”](#), we live in a society that is rotten for a host of reasons—only some of which were mentioned in my essay. But there *are* features of our society that we should want to continue after our society collapses, and we are most likely to be able to retain those features in a communitarian setting.

Those interested in our survival as a species, and those committed to a communitarian way of life need to get “married”!—for the good of us all. Likely, there are some in our midst who are already in both categories, but there need to be many more!

## [Our Mythical World\(view\)](#)

Alton C. Thompson

Michael Brenner prefaces his comments on the recently-released movie [Zero Dark Thirty](#), by [stating](#):

We are a Resourceful people. We are a Righteous people. We are a Resolute people who not shrink from the necessary however hard it may be. We are a Moral people [Ya, sure! See [this](#), e.g., and also see [this discussion](#) of Nick Turse's [Kill Anything That Moves](#)] who bravely enter the shadowy precincts where Idealism collides with Realism—and come out enhanced.

In truth [, however,] we are an Immature people—an immature people who demand the nourishment of myth and legend that exalt us. Actual reality intimidates and unsettles us; virtual reality is the comforting substitute.

He continues—in referring to the movie:

The film's paramount message is that it [i.e., torture] does [work], that it did lead inexorably to the killing of Osama bin-Laden, and that anyone who gives precedence to ethical considerations had better be prepared to accept the potentially awful consequences. The heroines and heroes make the right judgment after struggling with their consciences.

The irony of a movie such as *Zero Dark Thirty* is that the “righteous” killing glorified in the movie mirrors what we are currently *doing to ourselves*. For we Americans are not only “gifted” at killing others in remote parts of the world, but currently digging a deep grave—not only for *ourselves*, but for our *species*, potentially.

How? We are a major polluter, and refuse to admit that our *way of life* is the major culprit. Over the decades, developments in the *use* of fossil fuels—first coal, and then petroleum and natural gas—have occurred, reflecting the Resourcefulness/creativity of us Westerners; and *those* developments—in powering transportation vehicles, heating/cooling buildings, etc.—have had a profound impact on *how* our society developed, not only geographically, but sociologically, etc.

I should add that those developments, in conjunction with a growing population (in part via natural increase, in part immigration), have resulted in our society becoming one of the world's premier polluters—and the world's *champion* polluter on a *per capita* basis. (Something to be *really* proud of!)

The crucial fact here is that not only did developments in the use of fossil fuels play a huge role in how our society *developed*, but that an *unintended* consequence of that development is that our way of life became *dependent* on those fuels. True, there *are* alternatives to fossil fuels (e.g.,

wind/water power, biomass), and research is continuing on that front; but it is difficult to imagine that *any* possible substitute for, e.g., petroleum—being a liquid—could be a *perfect* substitute for petroleum itself.

Thus, we appear to be “stuck” with petroleum: Either we continue to use petroleum, and (therefore) continue to pollute; or we switch to other—“safer”—sources of energy, and are (therefore) *forced* to change our way of life drastically. However, our reluctance—simply as humans—to change our way of life in any drastic way means that we will likely continue to use petroleum as a fuel—i.e., we will “stick” with petroleum. Call that being Resolute—or being Stupid!—it’s what we are likely to do.

Adding to that possibility is the fact that those who mine coal and drill/[frack](#) for petroleum products are intent on *continuing* those activities—for it provides them with their livelihood ([plus!](#)). Surely the individuals who control these companies are aware of the fact that scientists such as [James Hansen](#) have been sounding the global warming alarm for years, but these energy leaders have either been ignoring those warnings, or believe that global warming isn’t occurring—so “possessed” are they by “the bottom line.” Either way, it is reasonable to expect that they will continue to “do their thing”—i.e., mining, drilling, and fracking.

If that isn’t bad enough, there is the danger—discussed well by Dr. [Clive Hamilton](#) (author of [Requiem for a Species](#)—that some scientists (“prostitutes” might be a better name for them!) will convince governments of the need to initiate [geo-engineering](#) measures—which, as Hamilton points out, would be highly immoral. Evidently the belief that such measures will solve the global warming problem stem from our *faith* (as very “religious” people!) in our Resourcefulness; and it’s entirely in the realm of possibility that at some point our government will pursue this course—in a Resolute manner, of course.

If it does, that course will likely be pursued *as if* it were a Moral one—one having the purpose of “saving” our society and species from disaster. But *will* it accomplish that objective?

If you didn’t notice, *that* was a rhetorical question! As [Al Gore](#) might put it, there are certain “[inconvenient truths](#)” that stand in the way of this “solution”:

- We have likely already passed, or soon will, a tipping point relative to global warming. (See, e.g., Dr. Hamilton’s “[is it too late](#)” [video](#).) That is, the *negative* feedback mechanisms that have been maintaining relative stability have given, or soon will give, way to *positive* such mechanisms—whose “function” is to speed up the process of change.
- Not only is it highly unlikely that geo-engineering efforts would fail to slow down, or halt, global warming; the *unintended consequences* of those efforts might be even worse than the “disease.”



- The change that *is* likely to occur (in the absence of geo-engineering efforts) is likely to put tremendous stress on our society (*all* societies, in fact), to the point that our society will collapse within a few decades—and a severe culling of population will occur, both here and in other societies, and both before and (especially) after that collapse occurs.

What is most unfortunate today is that the people who are most *dominant* in the world today (the American people—but their “leaders” in particular) are also the most *immature*. Rather than leading us *away* from global warming, they are leading us *toward* it—thereby exposing not only Americans, but all others in the world, to possible disaster.

*That* fact does not, however, mean that *all* of us need to suffer from the actions of our immature, stupid leaders. There *is* a possible course of action to take, that of engaging in *adaptive* activities—which, it must be emphasized, would involve *changing one’s way of life* drastically: The *source* of our problem lies in our way of life, and the *answer*—insofar as there is one!—to that problem is to adopt a new way of life, one designed to withstand the ravages that global warming is likely to be inflicting on us soon. (That process has already started!) These are points that I have made repeatedly in previous essays on this web site, so it’s unnecessary for me to elaborate on them here.

Granted that changing one’s way of life drastically is a ‘tall order.’ My hope, however, is that a movement will arise that will provide assistance—practical and monetary—to those interested in doing so; as I have stated previously, this movement will need to originate with private individuals and organizations[1]—as only a fool would look to government for leadership on this matter.[2]

In addition, my hope is that the leaders of that movement focus not just on survival *per se*, but *decent* survival—insofar as the latter is possible. What *that* means, above all, is attempting to create a new way of life that accords well with our “design specifications” as humans. (See Chapters 2 – 4 in my [eBook](#).)

## Endnotes

1. An example would be the [Sierra Club](#), founded by [John Muir](#) (who grew up not far from where I did). In fact, yesterday (January 24, 2013) I sent an email to the director of the Wisconsin chapter (named for John Muir) suggesting as much—but must say that I do not expect a positive response.
2. During the presidency of [Franklin Delano Roosevelt](#) a [communities program](#) was initiated, with the village where I live—[Greendale](#)—having two “sister cities,” [Greenbelt](#), Maryland, and [Green Hills](#), in Cincinnati, Ohio. However, with our society’s movement in a “[neo-liberalism](#)” direction (especially by our “leaders”—who act as lackeys for the elite), the probability that anything of that sort would occur now is very close to zero.



## **What's the Name for This Psychiatric Disorder?**

Alton C. Thompson

A [recent report](#) by Steve Connor notes that billionaires such as David and Charles Koch are not only funding efforts to “undermine the science of global warming,” but are making a concerted effort to hide that fact from the public. Connor lists such organizations as Americans for Prosperity, The Donors Fund, Donors Capital Fund, and Knowledge and Progress Fund, and notes:

Robert Brulle, a sociologist at Drexel University in Philadelphia, has estimated that over the past decade about \$500m has been given to organisations devoted to undermining the science of climate change, with much of the money donated anonymously through third parties.

The motivation of wealthy donors who provide money anonymously to such organizations is likely, in most cases, that their wealth is, and has been, derived from the fossil fuel industry—the major source of the “greenhouse” gases that are directly responsible for most of the global warming that is occurring. Connor states, for example, that:

an audit trail reveals that Donors [Capital Fund] is being indirectly supported by the American billionaire Charles Koch who, with his brother David, jointly owns a majority stake in Koch Industries, a large oil, gas and chemicals conglomerate based in Kansas.

I suppose that if one controls, and draws wealth from, an industry that is becoming a “public nuisance,” one will want to continue that industry’s operations, and even finance efforts to convince the public that claims that global warming is occurring are a hoax. It’s also understandable that one would want to hide one’s support for efforts to discredit climate change science—such as the notorious “[climategate](#)” case—from the public.

But how can one be so *individualistic* in one’s thinking that one is unable to comprehend that pursuing one’s *self-interest* can have limits? That if global warming soon accelerates—as it’s likely to do—and becomes a killer of people, with the magnitude of that killing resulting in societal collapse, and thereby further killing, that *they* will somehow be able to escape this killing? Granted that once this process begins (it has already!), the very wealthy will have an advantage in acquiring food for their sustenance, and other necessities. But a point will be reached when the main survivors are being self-sufficient, and will be unwilling to share what they produce to the very wealthy—at any price, because by that time money itself (including gold coins!) will be worthless.

Are the very wealthy so lacking in intelligence that they are unable to understand a point that should be obvious to any normal person with normal intelligence? Or is it that they are so “possessed” with the *neo-liberalism* ideology that they are simply unable to think beyond a fixation on the “bottom line”?

Another possibility, of course, is that the very wealthy tend to have a certain mental disorder—and I wish I knew its name, because I’m convinced that that’s their problem.

## **The Limitations of Economics**

Alton C. Thompson

Robert Reich began a [recent essay](#) this way:

Brace yourself. In coming weeks you'll hear there's no serious alternative to cutting Social Security and Medicare, raising taxes on middle class, and decimating what's left of the federal government's discretionary spending on everything from education and job training to highways and basic research.

"We" must make these sacrifices, it will be said, in order to deal with our mushrooming budget deficit and cumulative debt. But most of the people who are making this argument are very wealthy or are sponsored by the very wealthy: Wall Street moguls like Pete Peterson and his "Fix the Debt" brigade, the Business Roundtable, well-appointed think tanks and policy centers along the Potomac, members of the Simpson-Bowles commission.

These regressive sentiments are packaged in a mythology that Americans have been living beyond our means: We've been unwilling to pay for what we want government to do for us, and we are now reaching the day of reckoning.

The truth is most Americans have not been living beyond their means. The problem is their means haven't been keeping up with the growth of the economy—which is why most of us need better education, infrastructure, and healthcare, and stronger safety nets.

Reich—currently Chancellor's Professor of Public Policy at the University of California at Berkeley, and formerly Secretary of Labor in the Bill Clinton administration—is a highly intelligent—and clever—man, the latter indicated in his statement that "most Americans have not been living beyond their means. The problem is their means haven't been keeping up with the growth of the economy . . . ." But Reich's thinking illustrates problems that are common with economists—his focus is (a) only on the *economy* portion of the society, and (b) on the *immediate future*.

Economists, as *specialists* (rather than *generalists*, like most of us), in effect *blind* themselves to the fact that the economy is but a *part* of the total society. The economy *is* an important part of the society, true, and it plays a crucial role in *affecting* the other parts of the society. But those facts do not alter the more *basic* fact that the economy is *not* the society—i.e., it's a mistake to *equate* the two.

The fact that economists focus on the immediate future (with, of course, some of them being economic *historians*, interested in tracing, and explaining, economic developments over time) means that they *tacitly* hold a certain assumption regarding the future: The nature of the society and its economy will change over time, but do so in a *gradualistic* manner—so that the

difference between the economy now and, say, 30 years from now will not be so great as to not be understandable, using the same principles that are applicable today.

But is such a (tacitly-held) assumption a *reasonable* one? Perhaps it was before, say, 1950—although there have been periods before then (most notably the Great Depression) during which the existing situation forced a re-thinking of time-honored principles, the result being the creation of new principles (with [John Maynard Keynes](#) being the notable innovator during that period).

Ironically, the old principles—i.e., those accepted prior to the Great Depression—were inadequate for *predicting* the Great Depression, so there was a “catch-up” period during which intellectual principles needed to become congruent with societal reality, with a *new* “orthodoxy” then being established. Once that occurred, Economics again became somnolent; and although some economists have been looking into the future and seeing the dark clouds of disaster resulting, in the near future, from global warming, Reich does not appear to be among them—and neither are most of his colleagues.

Indeed, with the rise to prominence of the likes of [Milton Friedman](#), not only has there been a lack of interest in the future (from the standpoint of what the future is likely to be like), but has been *retrogression* so far as understanding the economy is concerned. Understanding the economy, that is, from a “general welfare”—rather than elite—perspective.

I’m sure that Reich will continue to make astute comments about the American economy—but is likely to say nothing that would help prepare Americans and others for the dark clouds ahead—the tumultuous situation that is likely to be precipitated by global warming.

The problem with courses in Economics—among other disciplines, I should add—is that they prepare the student for the *immediate* future (if, that is, s/he can find a job upon graduation!), and do very little to prepare one for a drastically *different* future. Thus, the student can only become prepared for *that* future by engaging in private conversations with professors (possibly), or reading the many fine articles available on internet sites. (Of course, there are plenty of other articles that will serve only to mislead the student!)

Global warming is likely to result in drastic changes in the *nature* of our economy. Given this likelihood, it behooves us to foresee this, and then begin the process of creating a *new* economy—one designed to withstand the ravages of global warming (insofar as that’s possible), and provide all survivors with a decent standard of living—again, insofar as *that’s* possible.

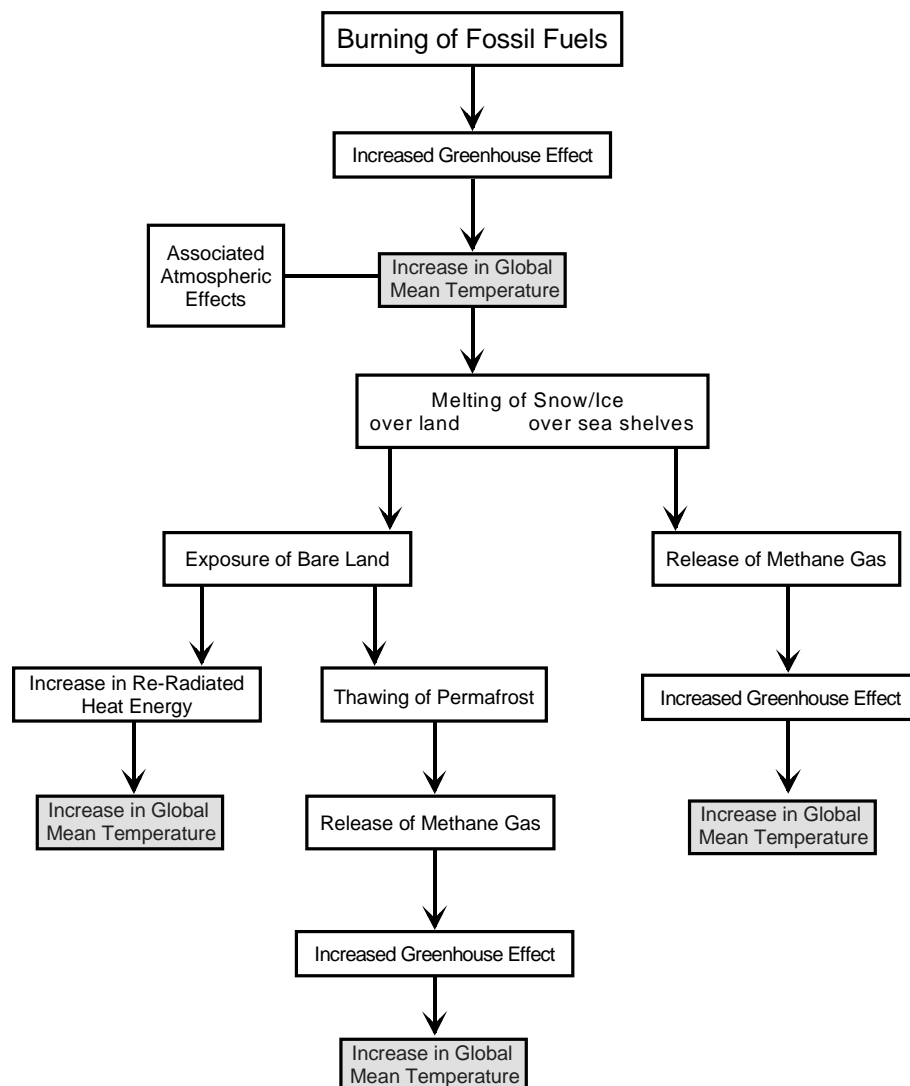
It’s unlikely, however, that any members of the Economics profession will make any useful suggestions as to the direction that we should take; and whatever economists *do* survive the ravages that lie ahead because of global warming will need to forget virtually all of the

Economics principles they have learned, and develop a version of Economics appropriate for the New Economy.

## The Complexity of Global Warming

Alton C. Thompson

The term “global warming” suggests a trend of increase in the global mean temperature (usually measured using the Centigrade temperature scale by scientists), and suggests nothing beyond that. The fact of the matter, however, is that (a) the term itself is used to encompass atmospheric phenomena *in addition* to warming *per se*, and (b) the warming associated with global warming has various effects which *themselves* contribute to global warming (to say nothing of other types of effects). It is for this reason that some refer to global warming as a “process that feeds on itself.” The figure below identifies some of the major such effects, and I use the ensuing discussion to describe those various effects briefly.



What “gets the ball rolling” here is the burning of fossil fuels—an activity that started to become notable around 1750 CE, with the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Coal was the first of the fossil fuels to gain importance (for powering steam engines—used in factories, locomotives, and ships), to be followed by petroleum products (gasoline and diesel fuel) and, more recently, natural gas (used especially for heating buildings and heating water).

Although fossil fuels differ in how “dirty” they are, the burning of

any of them involves a transfer of carbon—in either solid or liquid form—to the atmosphere, in the form of the gas carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>).

Earth's *has* an atmosphere—which allows us to live on earth!—and this atmosphere is analogous to the glass of a greenhouse in that it “traps” heat energy. For thousands of years the gaseous composition of the atmosphere remained relatively constant, even after humans appeared on the scene. With the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, however, the human burning of fossil fuels began to *change* that composition. To be more precise, the burning of fossil fuels by certain *Westerners*—beginning with the English—began to change the atmosphere's composition—began, i.e., to increase the atmosphere's carbon dioxide composition. Put another way, the burning of fossil fuels increased the intensity of the “[greenhouse effect](#).”

Because carbon introduced into the atmosphere tends to stay there for a long period of time, the continued—and increased—use of fossil fuels by Westerners increased the CO<sub>2</sub> content of the atmosphere, thereby gradually intensifying the greenhouse effect—and increasing the global mean temperature (as more of the heat energy re-radiating from earth was trapped. Between 1750 and the present the global mean increased by “only” [0.8° C.](#), however—and that “slight” increase has had noticeable effects only in the past few years. (The global mean *could* very well increase by 3.2° C. between now and 2060, see p. xiii in [Turning Down the Heat](#)—which would be an extremely significant increase, with significant consequences—but *that's* not the subject of this essay.)

As the figure above indicates, “global warming” involves more than warming *per se*. It involves (referring just to atmospheric phenomena here) (a) an increase in the number of storms, (b) an increase in the severity of storms, and (c) increased variability in atmospheric characteristics for any given location (with, though, variability in this from location to location). Thus, the effects—for humans and other living things—of global warming include all four of the above-mentioned phenomena. My focus in this essay, however, is just on those effects of global warming that have implications for further warming, so that I make no further reference to the other three global warming phenomena below.

For the purposes of this essay, increased storminess, etc., are of tangential importance—and the figure depicts them that way. Of more relevance for the purposes of this essay is the fact that much of the added heat involved with global warming melts snow and ice (such as in the Arctic), the melting of especial importance being that (a) over land and (b) over shallow sea shelves. That is, a significant change from pre-1750 days is that the air that is heated melts more snow and ice now than occurred in the past. Why is that significant?

The melting of snow/ice over land involves the exposure of bare land to the sun's rays—with the short-wave rays from the sun now being absorbed by earth rather than simply reflected back into space (the [albedo](#) concept). That absorption of short-wave energy results in the heating of the land, and the re-radiation of heat energy, now in the form of long-wave energy, into the

atmosphere. As long-wave energy (unlike the short-wave variety) is “trapped” by the atmosphere—with the amount of “trapping” being dependent on the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere—that (additional, relative to the situation before 1750) re-radiated heat energy increases the global mean temperature.

Much of the land covered by snow/ice has permafrost under in it, and as bare ground is exposed, not only does the incoming solar radiation heat it, thereby thawing the permafrost, but the ground then releases a deadly greenhouse gas into the atmosphere, methane—a gas that is 20 times more potent as a greenhouse gas as is carbon dioxide. Thus, this release of methane increases the greenhouse effect, thereby increasing the global mean temperature even more.

The melting of snow/ice over [shallow sea shelves](#) enables the sun’s rays to penetrate to the ocean bottom a few feet below, and the heating of the ocean bottom that results means the release of methane gas which, in reaching the surface, enters the atmosphere—to produce an increased greenhouse effect, thereby increasing the global mean even further.

What’s notable about this process is that although an increase in the global mean temperature is a direct *result* of our burning of fossil fuels, the (a) exposure of bare land, (b) thawing of permafrost, and (c) melting of snow/ice over shallow sea shelves—all of them being results of our direct burning of fossil fuels—*themselves* become causes of global warming. Put another way, “one thing leads to another.”

This is the sort of problem that we encounter when we “mess around” with Nature—with the tragedy here being that we humans have a tendency to build *traps* for ourselves without even realizing it—traps from which we may not be able to escape, even when we realize what we’ve done. (See, e.g., [this article](#) in *The Scotsman* newspaper.)

What compounds the tragedy is that even when we *do* come to recognize the fact that we have created the mess that we are in, we seem unable to go beyond inanity in the solutions that we then offer to “fix” the mess. For example, Tim Flannery bases Chapter 25 (“Over to You”) of his [The Weather Makers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth](#) (2005) on the premise that if the “consumer takes the initiative in tackling climate change,” the global warming problem can be solved.

Flannery’s discussion has two problems, however. His suggestions regarding what people should do assume that (a) all people *can* do what he suggests, and (b) that they *will*—both of which are unrealistic. Second, Flannery’s suggestions are all of a *lifestyle* nature, whereas the seriousness of the global warming problems requires a *way of life* solution—with the proviso that even *that* solution would be able to “save” only a small part of the human population.

Without even recognizing it, scientists—such as Flannery—tend to take the *structure* of the society that they live in as a “given,” and offer their solutions on the basis of that tacit



assumption. In the past this usually “worked,” but because today’s problem of global warming has our way of life as its fundamental cause, the logical solution to the problem is societal system change—of the right sort (a point that I have commented on in previous essays on this site.

In effect, scientists have tended to use the “lever model” in offering solutions to problems. That is, once they identify the cause(s) of a problem, they in effect argue that that cause(s) can be regarded as a “lever”: Pull it in the right way, and the problem will be fixed. This model is good as far as it goes—if, that is, the lever(s) involved can easily be pulled, e.g., by government action.

Our situation today is of a different order than past problems in that the global warming problem is rooted in our *way of life*. Only by “fixing” that way of life can this problem be solved—something requiring a sociological-geographical-psychological perspective (that than one rooted in, e.g., Physics or Chemistry)—and creativity.

The “fixing” that is required will not be accomplished easily; and if it is accomplished at all (which is not a foregone conclusion!), it will likely allow only *some* to survive, unfortunately (a point that I have made in a number of earlier essays).

Our species is supposedly the most intelligent of the species, but . . . We have built for ourselves an abstract intellectual world, and live more in it than in the *real* world. That fact may very well be our downfall.

[<http://bravenewworld.in/2013/02/08/some-friday-morning-ramblings/>]  
[This is the 1500<sup>th</sup> essay on this web site—I also had Nos. 500 and 1000]]

## [Some Monday Morning Ramblings](#)

Alton C. Thompson

Usually I take the bus to work (about a 45-minute ride), but need to drive 2 miles to the nearest bus stop. While driving, I am always playing a CD, and this morning was playing [this CD](#). The music on this CD is played by a small German group (pictured on the cover of the CD); and although the only German that I know of in my family tree is a Wolfgang Klingenberg, who left the Constance area of Germany around 1500, and purchased (with money that he had absconded with?!) a large parcel of land at the end of [Songefjord](#), I like to take a break from classical music now and then, and listen to happy music such as is contained on this CD.

Of the songs on this CD, my favorite by far is *Edelweiss*, a song used in [The Sound of Music](#). (Here are three videos of it, the first a duet by [John Denver and Julie Andrews](#), the second by a [Chinese chorus](#), accompanied by piano, and the third an [orchestral version](#) played by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.) I find the utter beauty of this music so over-powering, that I cannot listen to it without tears coming into my eyes—with the pictures that accompany the orchestral version adding a further dimension to this piece's beauty.

I probably can't articulate with accuracy *why* this piece has such appeal to me, but would guess that part of the reason is that its Nature orientation reminds me of my childhood. In my early years, and through the second grade of elementary school, we lived in a house situated on the lower side of Mt. Morris, just outside the village of [Mt. Morris](#), Wisconsin, a short distance from my dad's ancestral home. (My great-great-grandfather, Torje Tjøstolvsen, and family, had emigrated to this area from the [Tvedestrand](#) area of Norway in 1853, having been preceded in 1848 by my great-grandfather, Tjøstolv Torjesen—who had emigrated to Chicago.) The driveway for the current [Nordic Mountain](#) ski hill goes through the area where my dad's ancestral home once stood.

On p. 20 of [this .pdf file](#) there is the following statement: "Listed as one of the author's favorite parks in the recent book, [County Parks of Wisconsin](#), Mt. Morris Hills is the largest and most popular park in the Waushara County Park system. This park offers spectacular views from a vantage point 300 feet above the surrounding countryside. Fall colors bring many sightseers to the top of the 'mountain.'" (This park was created long after I moved away from the area; while my dad was alive—he died a little over 25 years ago—he made a sign for the park, which I assume is still there—I haven't been there for years, thus I don't know for sure.)

Mt. Morris is by no means a mountain—it’s merely a hill (technically, a [monadnock](#) covered with glacial debris—I was a Geology minor as an undergraduate!). But for a young boy, hills are good enough—and more! I would roam around in the woods that covered most of the hill, occasionally resting on a large [erratic boulder](#). (Just *thinking* about those days long ago brings me joy now!) Often a cousin or one of my younger brothers (I have three) would accompany me on my jaunts, and at times we would play games on the side of the hill; but I also liked to wander around on the hillside by myself.

Although I love *Edelweiss* as a musical piece, it is especially the [lyrics](#) of *Edelweiss* that remind me of Mt. Morris:

Edelweiss, Edelweiss  
Every morning you greet me  
Small and white clean and bright  
You look happy to meet me  
Blossom of snow may you bloom and grow  
Bloom and grow forever  
Edelweiss, Edelweiss  
Bless my homeland forever.[1]

As a child I lived close to Nature, and I loved it (or so I recall). What interests me about the lyrics of *Edelweiss*—written by [Oscar Hammerstein II](#) for *The Sound of Music*—is the love that it expresses (sung by [Captain Georg Johannes von Trapp](#), played by [Christopher Plummer](#) in the film version of *Sound*) for the *physical environment* of Austria. Even now, Mt. Morris is often in my mind—and also primarily in terms of the physical environment that I remember, more than the people that I knew.

It is perhaps for this reason that I believe that many of our problems today—including, most certainly, global warming—can be attributed in part to our “unnatural” way of life—a way of life that does not allow us to live in accord with our “design specifications” as humans (see Chapters 2 – 4 in my [eBook](#)), and in part to the fact that most of us live *apart* from Nature. Some of us (especially us old geezers!—I just turned 73) are fortunate in that we have remembrances of living close to Nature that we can often call to consciousness; but most members of the younger generation are deprived of that experience. Those with rich parents may have an opportunity to attend “camp.” But such an experience—because it’s not only short, but does little to *connect* one with the “surround” offered by the camp—simply is not comparable to *growing up* close to Nature.

If one thinks of there being a continuum with “control mentality” on one end and “adaptive mentality” on the other, [2] I would place myself on the “adaptive” end of this continuum—and would attribute this largely to the fact that I spent my youth in rural Wisconsin, close to Nature. I suspect that one who has been raised in an urban area—a large one in particular—would tend *not* to develop such a mentality—in part because of the physical environment, in part because

one will tend to acquire the mentality of one's parents and associates. And I would add that the higher the social class of one's parents, the more likely one is to acquire a control mentality (with "higher" here intended to have a neutral—or even negative—meaning!).

One having a control mentality has—ironically—a mind that is *itself* controlled (!)—by some ideology. The *nature* of that ideology will express the nature of the society within which one lives—so that one with—"possessed by," would be a more accurate expression—a *control* mentality in a *capitalist* society such as ours will be controlled by the "holy trinity" of greed, materialism, and selfishness. That is, he (for this mentality is more common with males than with females) will strive to become as rich as possible (à la Donald Trump), and will use the money gained to purchase material things—for himself—doing so in a "conspicuous" way, as [Thorstein Veblen](#) famously put it. And because one with a highly-developed control mentality tends to be "possessed" by that mentality, he will lack [empathy](#)—and therefore not care who he steps on in climbing the "ladder of success." Put another way, he will be seriously [alienated](#) from *his* human self, as well as that of others.

One with a control mentality will continually be striving to "best" others—so that the presence of such people in a society is the primary reason why its social structure becomes hierarchical, and tends to become *ever more* [imbalanced](#). But control is exercised not only over other *people* (without any sense of how this *feels* to those being controlled/manipulated); it is also—via developments in science and technology—[exercised over Nature](#)—the development of such a mentality going back at least to [Sir Francis Bacon](#) [1561 – 1626], and being re-enforced (I would argue) by urban living and the development of a strongly hierarchical social class system.

I have argued in previous essays on this site that our way of life is the major culprit, so far as global warming is concerned, and that because of that fact, the solution to that problem is a *drastic change in our way of life*—with that solution not, however, being a true solution because global warming will cull much of the world's population, *regardless of what we do*—i.e., there is no "true solution."

I would *now* add that our way of life *itself* developed because some in our midst (over the centuries) have developed control mentalities, and their resulting proclivity for "using" others (and the earth's resources—"resource" representing a *utilitarian*, rather than *appreciative*, stance toward Nature) has yielded our current sad situation.

This new explanation might seem to have as its corollary that the "way out" is to gain control over the control mentality! And I agree with that conclusion (!), for in my offering the [Structured Interaction Group](#) (going under the name [New Word Fellowship](#) in another of my essays) as a vehicle for planning communities (and "operating" them once planned), I have advocated an *institution* designed to prevent a hierarchy from arising. Thus, rather than my current discussion of the control mentality being in *conflict* with my earlier discussions, it is entirely *compatible* with them.

Actually, I foresee not only the SIG or NeWF as playing a role in combating a control mentality, but also the “change in scenery” involved with a group getting together to plan a community for themselves (one to not only withstand the ravages of global warming, but to provide a decent life for *all* of its residents). For I foresee the communities involved being created in rural areas—enabling the residents to have close contact with Nature. Not that other analogous “movements” might not also be occurring (e.g., one led by Milwaukee’s [Will Allen](#)), these not necessarily having a rural orientation; but I foresee that movement having a *rural orientation* as forming the vanguard—in a sense providing leadership, in a “[city upon a hill](#)” sense, to other movements that might be developing.

## Endnotes

1. I wish that I could say that; but given this country’s terrible past (the genocide of the indigenous population, and slavery), and current (for a number of decades now) interference in the affairs of other countries, I cannot (“interference” being a rather “soft” word to use for the harshness with which we have treated the people in other countries—Viet Nam being one of the most shameful examples.
2. One anonymous author [identifies](#) a “control mentality” and a “love mentality.” The “Vision Statement” for this blog begins: “This blog is based on the vision of a society without hierarchies ([a hierarchy](#) is defined as a system where control is systemic and directed). This is closely related to the Prime Directive (do not impose harm): everywhere we see imposed harm, we see hierarchies directing that harm, from poverty to crime to war and starvation.”

## **Hierarchies and Global Warming**

Alton C. Thompson

Dr. Ian H. Robertson—a professor of Psychology at Trinity College (in Dublin) and author of *The Winner Effect: The Neuroscience of Success and Failure*, who also has a [web site](#)—in [writing about bankers](#) (referred to by some—and with good reason!—as “banksters”) last year offered some insightful comments on the *behavioral implications* associated with hierarchies. Implications that help us—to a degree, at least—to understand why governments have done a poor job in addressing the global warming problem.

I should note at the outset here, however, that in using the word “help” above I do not mean to imply that knowing the nature of hierarchies in governments will enable one *fully* to explain the behaviors of those who populate such hierarchies. On the one hand there is the “inner ring” aspect of hierarchies, [described well by Nozomi Hayase recently](#) on these pages. And on the other hand there are the *external pressures* exerted on those who people government hierarchies by energy companies, “think tanks” funded by the wealthy, etc. But recognizing these qualifications, there *are* aspects of hierarchies *in general* that are applicable to governmental ones, and it is these *general* aspects of hierarchies that I will focus on in this essay.

The defining characteristic of a hierarchy (in its *formal* aspects, that is) is that some individuals “report” to other individuals; i.e., the work of some individuals is guided and evaluated by other individuals—and this relationship gets expressed in a “layered” manner within a given organization—whether public or private. That is, there are supervisors who “supervise” the work of a specific group of “bottom dwellers,” managers who “manage” the work of a group of supervisors; directors who “direct” the work of a group of managers; vice presidents who “vice president” (!) the work of a group of managers; etc. The “higher” the position occupied in an organization, the less one will likely know about the nature of the work of those two or more layers below; but the “higher” the position, the more power one wields—and the higher one’s salary, and the better one’s benefit package.

Given that there is more and income, power, and prestige the “higher” the level that one occupies in the hierarchy, and given the value system of our (“Christian”?) society (the “holy trinity” of greed, materialism, and selfishness), people are expected to want to “rise” in whatever organization they happen to be associated with. However, (a) not all people in our society are “possessed” by the society’s dominant values, and therefore lack an interest to “rise;” (b) factors other than “qualifications” (e.g., “connections”—such as family ones) often affect who “rises” and who doesn’t; and (c) “in an organization where promotion is based on achievement, success, and merit, that organization’s members will eventually be promoted beyond their level of

ability”—i.e., the so-called “[Peter Principle](#).” As a consequence of the latter principle, the fact that one’s “immediate superior” may be unqualified for her/his job is one of the sources of hurt/anger that one feels as an employee in an organization—again, whether that organization is public or private.

This latter fact—one of some importance for the efficient “running” of an organization—is not mentioned in Robertson’s article, but his article *does* make a number of important points, which I will summarize below, and then develop their implications for responding to global warming. The focus of Robertson’s article is on *power*, and one of the interesting aspects of his discussion is his emphasis on the fact that just as *having* power in an organization has implications for one’s attitudes and behavior, so does the *absence* of power.

Robertson begins his article by commenting on the implications of *having* power, and he initiates his presentation by stating: “Holding power changes brains by boosting testosterone, which in turn increases the chemical messenger dopamine in the brain’s reward systems. Extraordinary power causes extraordinary brain changes, which in their extreme form manifest themselves in personality distortions, such as those seen in dictators like Muammar Gaddafi.” He continues, “given that power is one of the most potent brain-changing drugs known to humankind, unconstrained power has enormously distorting effects on behaviour, emotions and thinking.”

That is, *having* power causes brain changes—changes which, although of “only” a temporary nature (i.e., lasting only while being in the organization, and having power)—affect one’s thinking, emotions, and behavior *while having that power*. Meaning that those “below” one in the organization are affected by one’s power (*how*, depending on how one “inflicts” it on them—which is, of course, not necessarily *just* a matter of “choice”); and also meaning that the very *direction* taken by the organization may be affected.

*How*, specifically, does power affect the one possessing it? “While power in moderate doses can make people smarter, more strategic in their thinking, bolder and less depressed, in too-large doses it can make them egocentric and un-empathic, greedy for rewards—financial, sexual, interpersonal, material—likely to treat others as objects, and with a dulled perception of risk.” This “power-primed boldness and forward-looking focus on rewards arises from a neural ‘approach mode’ that biases attention, memory, action and emotions towards thoughts and feelings linked to success and conquest.”

“Low power, on the other hand,” notes Robertson, “tends to trigger a neural ‘avoidance mode’, where mood is low and anxiety high because of worries about threats and future uncontrollable events. These approach and avoidance modes are linked to different networks in the right and left sides of the brain respectively, and to different chemical messenger systems.”



Interestingly, having—or not having—power also has implications for the *ethical* quality—or lack of such—of one’s behavior. “[Researchers at Tilburg University](#) showed that people made to feel more powerful cheated more when they believed themselves to be unobserved. Power also made ordinary people more hypocritical when making judgments about moral dilemmas, being much more strict in applying rules to others, but much more lax in applying them to themselves. Even tiny amounts of artificial power, in other words, increased both immorality and hypocrisy.”

He adds, related to this point: “Paul Piff of the University of Berkeley found in a US-based study that, compared with lower class people, upper class individuals were more likely to break the law while driving, to show unethical tendencies in decision-making, to take valued goods from others, to lie in a negotiation, to cheat in order to improve their chances of winning a prize, and to endorse unethical behaviour in a work situation.” (Robertson’s *intent* here, obviously, was to refer to the [Greater Good Center](#) associated with the *University of California-Berkeley*. Also, see [this site](#). [Paul Piff](#) is one of the scholars associated with this important center.)

Piff went on to add that although not all higher-income people are greedy (i.e., “reward focused”), or tending to behave immorally or illegally, “more of the upper-class people . . . [showed] signs of greed than the lower social class ones” studied. Robertson then closed his article by stating: “Power and money both act on the brain’s reward system, which if over-stimulated for long periods develops appetites that are difficult to satisfy, just as is the case for drug addiction. We call these appetites greed and greedy people are never satisfied. That is the challenge for politicians and regulators.”

Given that the “regulators” Robertson refers to here would be *government* employees, he seems to imply that such employees are somehow “above the fray.” But are they *really*? Does not the fact that they are part of a hierarchy have an impact on their thinking, emotions, and behavior? Why should the fact that the organization of which they are a part is a *public*, rather than a *private*, one make any difference here?

Apart from any pressures put on high-level government employees from external “vested interests,” does not the “[revolving door](#)” [phenomenon](#) suggest to us the question: **Who will regulate the regulators?**—a modern version of “[Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?](#)”

Given that the “holy trinity” of greed, materialism, and selfishness are values that are so dominant in our society, it is foolish to expect government employees from being immune from these deficiencies. Canada used to be known for the barrier that separated government employees from the private sector—in that if one entered government service, one expected—and *was* expected—to *remain* in that service for the rest of one’s working life. Such a “wall of separation” has, however, never been present in the United States, and one suspects (in the absence of any empirical findings that I am aware of supporting this suspicion) that a major motive possessed by government employees is to “rise” as high as possible in the government’s



bureaucracy, so that the industry contacts they make in that “rise” will prove useful for obtaining employment in the private sector at some point.

What is particularly unfortunate about this “revolving door” between government and the private sector is that it is a “two-way street.” On the one hand, too many government employees simply look ahead to the day when they can “jump” to a lucrative job in the private sector; and too often the Executive, in making appointments, does so on the basis of “experience”—which, from a *practical* standpoint, means choosing people with *industry* experience—i.e., whose tendency (if but unconsciously) is to be primarily in promoting the interests of that *industry*, rather than those of the *general public*.

At present—i.e., given that *we are living in a time when global warming is looming on the horizon as perhaps the most serious problem we humans have ever faced*—the energy companies exercise an inordinate amount of power, and they are able to exercise influence over the (alleged) “regulators” in two ways:

- They have tremendous influence over who is selected to head governmental agencies—those pertaining to energy production having especial relevance here.
- The “revolving door” mentality so prevalent in our society motivates government employees to “suck up” to—rather than want to regulate—the energy companies, in the hope of landing a “plum” job with one of them in the near future. As a consequence, rather than making decisions based on a “general welfare” basis—and especially ones that looks to the future, recognizing the danger posed by global warming—they make decisions on a *personal career* basis. Given that this would involve refraining from undertaking, and then publishing, reports that might be critical of the energy industry, *their* integrity—and that of their *work*—should be always regarded as suspect by us citizens.

Once one comes to understand the nature of organizations, and the particular factors that influence what government employees do, one will lose whatever confidence one might have had previously in government’s ability to address the global warming problem in any meaningful way. I worked for a short while for the Planning Office of Milwaukee County, and also for an even shorter time for the County Supervisor who represented the district I live in, and would have to say that at a *local urban* level there may not be problems in implementing global warming policies (because no issues arise!). However, if I had worked for a local government within which [fracking](#), for example, was an issue, this would not be the case. In working for a local government that was of an urban nature the only problem that I encountered was that some of the planning work for which I was hired impinged on planning activity typically done by the Parks Department, so that some “feathers” were thereby ruffled—but that’s a different story!

The key point that I want to make here is that although we have a tendency in this society to look to government to solve problems that affect many, or all, of us, given the fact that global

warming is beginning to rear its ugly head, and will become ever more vicious over time, along with the factors—outlined above—that affect governmental decision-making, especially as it pertains to energy and global warming, one should expect that government will be more of a *barrier* to progress than a *help* relative to this problem. In part, the problem with looking to government for help is that many government employees are lacking in much *competence*. More serious, however, is the fact that the “revolving door” phenomenon—with its “incestuous” relationship between government and the private sector—makes likely that the public’s interest will receive short shrift from government.

Even if we *could* have some measure of confidence in our (national) government, it’s unlikely that government would take the steps necessary for our “salvation” from global warming (insofar as that’s *possible*). As I’ve emphasized in many of my previous essays on this site, given that our *way of life* is the primary reason that we are faced now with a global warming problem, the “obvious” solution is to *change* it—but the likelihood that government would “lead the way” on this is zero. Therefore, if such change is to occur, it will need to be accomplished by us private citizens and our private organizations.

## [My Intellectual Odyssey](#)

Alton C. Thompson

While a graduate student many years ago—first at the University of North Carolina, then at the University of Cincinnati—my specialty was Economic Geography. I learned, e.g., that economic activities, viewed from an economic geographer’s perspective, could be *classified* in various ways:

- From the standpoint of the *nature of the activities* themselves there were such activities as mining, quarrying, smelting, fabrication, engineering, transportation, wholesaling, retailing, banking, etc.
- In *sequential* terms there were primary activities (involving “raw” materials), secondary activities (involving the processing of the output of primary activities), tertiary activities (involving the “handling” of manufactured [1] products (i.e., transporting, storing, selling), and quaternary activities (ones providing support to other economic activities, such as insurance and banking).
- There is the “export/local” distinction, which has specific geographic relevance. The “export” activities in an area mainly sell their products/services beyond the boundary (wherever established) of the “locality,” whereas the “local” ones—as the name implies—sell primarily *within* the given locality. In a very real sense the local activities owe their existence to the export activities in the locality, so that the latter are often termed “basic” activities, the former “non-basic” ones. However, what may *attract* a given export firm to a given locality—or, conversely, the reason one *develops* in a given area—may be the *diversity* and *quality* of the local businesses already present in the area. So that what we have here is somewhat of a “chicken and egg” matter.
- Firms within a given industry can be categorized on the basis of *the nature of their ownership*—e.g., sole proprietorship, partnership, corporation—but such distinctions are usually of little interest to economic geographers.

Not only did I learn that economic activities can be *classified* in different ways, but that important work had been done in *understanding* the economic landscape at different [geographic scales](#). On the one hand, there had been important theoretical contributions by people such as [Johann Heinrich von Thünen](#), [Alfred Weber](#), [Walter Christaller](#) (“[central place theory](#)”), [August Lösch](#), [Walter Isard](#), [Allen Pred](#), [Charles Tiebout](#), [Ernest Burgess](#) (with his “[concentric zone](#)” [model](#)), and [Homer Hoyt](#) (with his “[sector](#)” [model](#)).

And, on the other hand, I learned that a vast amount of empirical work had been done relative to the economic landscape—the early such work having been almost purely descriptive, but with much of the later work having the intention of trying to understand the economic landscape in the light of relevant geographical theory.

I must say that I found much of this—and central place theory in particular—interesting and intellectually challenging. Perhaps I found it *interesting* because I had spent my childhood close to Nature, so that Geography had a “natural” appeal to me; and *challenging* because the combination of Geometry (my favorite math course in high school) and science that it involved appealed to my intellect—as well as my passion for finding order in apparent disorder.

At some point in time, however, I began to sense that Economic Geography as a *discipline* was based on the tacit assumption that some phenomena and events “out there” in the real world are *important*, others are *not*. What helped me come to this realization is that:

- As an undergraduate, my areas of specialty had been History, English, and Geology—and I had thought of *them* as all important.
- I watched the news on television on a regular basis, read newspapers, magazines, and books (other than ones pertaining to Geography), and learned from my viewing and reading that most people were *not* interested in Economic Geography!
- I learned the same thing from conversations with friends and relatives (including a brother-in-law, now deceased, who became a good friend).

As I became increasingly *conscious* of my discipline’s (tacit) assertion that some phenomena and events are important, some not, I started to realize, on the one hand, that what I should be concentrating my attention on was that which *was*, in some meaningful (i.e., “objective”) sense, important; and in having reached that intellectual conclusion, I started questioning whether my decision to focus on Economic Geography was the correct one.

“Theoretically,” this is a decision that one should make early in life, not during one’s middle years—so that by the time one reaches one’s middle years, one will have achieved a high level of success. But if one was raised—as I was—to value goals *other* than success, changing the direction of one’s course in “midstream” was not so unreasonable. In fact, the learning that one had gained, and the experiences that one had had, in reaching one’s middle years could be a *benefit*—as I was to learn.

Fortunately—although I did not realize this at the time—the “publish or perish” bug bit me, and I lost my university position. Thus, my wife, our adopted son, and I moved from Ohio back [2] to Wisconsin, and after spending 11 years at a variety of jobs (including a period of

unemployment) I “landed” my present position (with an avionics firm in Milwaukee), and have been with that firms for over 25 years so far.

I have had three jobs with this firm, and my present one is especially advantageous, for the work is not steady, enabling me to spend a considerable amount of time “surfing” the internet. That, along with the reading that I have done while at home, has enabled me to determine more clearly than ever before what *I* believe to be important; and the “free” time that I have while at work (!) has given me the opportunity to do more writing—of essays, especially—than I have ever done before in my life.

My own personal experience has led me to believe that most people “out there”—and perhaps especially those who are in the “work world”—live in the small world of their particular specialty, this being, I suspect, especially true of those whose specialty requires a number of years of formal training. I would guess that some of these individuals *sense* that their specialty is not particularly important, so far as the well-being of their fellows is concerned (in either the immediate, or long-run future), but are unable to *see* this clearly.

The important aspect of *that* strong possibility (from my perspective) is that even if one is highly educated, one’s mind may be so oriented to the small world that one lives in that one does not recognize how serious the threat of global warming is. Or, one is so tied to one’s particular *lifestyle* that, even though one is aware, intellectually, of the seriousness of this threat, one is unable to face the fact that *way of life change* (not mere lifestyle change) is the only answer to the problem—and that even *that* is an answer that will be able to “save” but a few people.

*How*, I ask, can this “nut be cracked”—*if*, that is, it *can* be? The tragedy here, of course, is that if more of the highly-educated/-intelligent people in our society would “wake up” to the danger lying ahead, it’s highly possible that more could be saved from the ravages of global warming—but it’s unlikely that this will occur.

## Endnotes

1. The world “manufacturing” [derives](#) from the Latin “manu factus,” which means “made by hand.” Karl [Marx](#) [1818 – 1893] [introduced](#) the term “machinofacture” in recognition of the fact that in his time *machinery*, rather, was commonly used to make most things. Today, of course, computers and robots play a huge role in the making of things.
2. My wife is from Richland Center, Wisconsin (home of Frank Lloyd Wright), but we had met while I was a student at the University of North Carolina. She had been working for an insurance company in Madison, Wisconsin, but was encouraged by her sister, whose husband was studying Chemistry at the University of North Carolina, to join them down there. She moved to Chapel Hill, found a job with the Institute of Government at the university, her work-mate there happened to be the wife of the man who became my

best friend while at UNC, we were introduced, and then got married in Maryland, while I was an instructor at (what was then) Salisbury State College.

## [Getting Serious About Adaptation](#)

Alton C. Thompson

Having recently watched [Mississippi Burning](#) again, I am thankful that I was born and raised in Wisconsin rather than Mississippi. For I shudder to think of the kind of person that I would be now had I been raised in that viciously backward part of the country (at the time of the incidents “reported” in this movie) instead of Wisconsin: Contrary to the theory—perhaps I should say *ideology*, rather—that we are born with “free will,” and are therefore responsible for all of our actions, a more realistic explanation of behavior is one that places greater emphasis on *contextual/environmental* factors than on “free will.” Still, it’s jolting to realize how badly humans can treat other humans, and it’s difficult to accept the fact that this still occurs—with our government seemingly leading the way (via *torturing* prisoners in Guantanamo, and *having* prisoners [tortured elsewhere](#)). “Softer” terms than “torture” are used to refer to this heinous activity; but, as William Shakespeare said, “[A rose by any other name](#). . . .”

Not only has torture not been a problem in Wisconsin (so far as I know), but the state has long been noted for having a progressive tradition—with a few exceptions, such as Senator [Joseph McCarthy](#), soiling our state’s reputation. In fact, the [Progressive Party \(of 1924\)](#) was “created as a vehicle for [then Senator] [Robert M. La Follette, Sr.](#) to run for president in [the 1924 election](#).” And the city of Milwaukee had Socialist mayors for most of the first half of the last century, the last one being [Frank Zeidler](#) (who I had the honor of meeting, during the period when I was employed by Milwaukee County).

Wisconsin’s progressivism has been manifested more recently by the creation of the [Governor’s Global Warming Task Force](#), created by Gov. James Doyle in 2007, along with the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change (WICCI), created later that year. Whereas the Task Force was [established to target](#) “mitigation of greenhouse gases—how we affect the climate—WICCI focuses solely on the impacts of climate change—how the climate affects us.” That is, the focus of the Task Force is on what we humans have been, and are, doing to affect climate, and what we can do to slow, if not halt, continued global warming; and WICCI “assesses and anticipates climate change impacts on specific Wisconsin natural resources, ecosystems and regions; evaluates potential effects on industry, agriculture, tourism and other human activities; and develops and recommends adaptation strategies that can be implemented by businesses, farmers, public health officials, municipalities, resource managers and other stakeholders.” Put [another way](#), “The mission of WICCI is to help Wisconsin adapt to climate change.”

To fulfill this mission, WICCI has established a number of “Working Groups,” some of a topical nature (e.g., [Agriculture](#), [Forestry](#), and [Plants & Natural Communities](#)), others geographical (e.g.,

[Central Sands Hydrology](#), [Green Bay](#), and [Milwaukee](#)—with the first of these three actually being both topical *and* geographical).

Although WICCI is a joint effort between the University of Wisconsin and the state’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR), [it claims](#) that it “represents a unique and innovative process to develop a statewide climate change adaptation strategy. WICCI has formed through a non-bureaucratic, bottom-up approach to engage scientists, researchers and management agencies in understanding the impacts of climate change on communities and natural resources across the state, and to develop strategies to make them more resilient to climate change.”

WICCI “[is governed](#) by a Science Council whose members are chosen from an array of disciplines within the University of Wisconsin System, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and other state and federal agencies, universities and institutions. The primary function of the Science Council is to organize and coordinate Working Groups that have the scientific expertise to assess climate change impacts pertinent to specific issues or areas of concern. An Operations and Outreach Unit in the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at UW-Madison facilitates the operations of the Science Council and be [i.e., “is”] responsible for the outreach mission of WICCI.” (The Nelson Institute was named for former Governor [Gaylord Nelson](#)—one of those rare politicians who one could be proud of.)

The members of the governing Science Council “represent disciplines including natural resource, ecological and engineering sciences; climate science; social sciences; public health; and the agricultural sciences.” That is, given that only highly educated/trained professionals *can* have any useful ideas regarding adaptation, it’s rational—even a matter of common sense, for that matter—to restrict the Science Council’s membership to such people. Adaptation—WICCI’s primary focus—is obviously a matter for which only *scientists* can have relevant and meaningful views, hence the necessity of *having* a Science Council, and restricting its membership to [bona fide](#) scientists.

The reason—and it is a legitimate one, of course—that the Science Council must be restricted to bona fide [scientists is that](#) “Adaptation is a complicated topic. In general terms, adaptation is any sort of adjustment in human or natural systems that helps those systems survive changing conditions or become better suited to them. Adaptation to climate change may involve both human and natural systems, or overlaps between the two.” Adaptation is, that is, way too complicated a matter for lay people to understand; and because lay people can’t *understand* adaptation, it goes without saying that they can offer no useful ideas regarding *how* to adapt.

I have, of course, been shifting here from a reportorial mode to a facetious one, because I perceive a blind spot in the thinking of those associated with WICCI. That blind spot has no connection with the one [that Charles Darwin \(allegedly\) had](#), but it *is* a blind spot—and, in my mind, an extremely serious one. I will illustrate my point here by quoting several statements from the WICCI web site, and then commenting upon them:



1. WICCI “develops and recommends adaptation strategies that can be implemented by businesses, farmers, public health officials, municipalities, resource managers and other stakeholders.”
2. “In general terms, adaptation is any sort of adjustment in human or natural systems that helps those systems survive changing conditions or become better suited to them.”
3. “At a fundamental level, there are only two parts to [adaptation science](#); calculating the probability of a future event, and creating contingency plans for those events most likely to materialize. Adaptation should focus on the greatest vulnerabilities.”

In addressing these comments, the logical starting point is to ask *why* the global warming problem exists, and this question can be answered on different “levels”:

- Because the concentration of “greenhouse” gases in the atmosphere has been increasing since about 1750 CE.
- Because humans started burning fossil fuels to an important degree beginning about 1750, that burning resulting in an increased concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.
- Because the Industrial Revolution that began around 1750 drastically changed people’s ways of life, making them more and more dependent on fossil fuels for running factories, powering motor vehicles, heating/cooling buildings, etc.
- A growing population, combined with increasing industrialization, resulted not only in increased *per capita* pollution (greenhouse gases in particular), but an increased *absolute* level of pollution.

I would add to these explanations one that is even more fundamental—and one whose origins precede 1750 by thousands of years. What I am referring to here is ***The Discrepancy***, which began to develop with the Agricultural Revolution about 10,000 years ago. (See Chapters 2 – 4 in my [eBook](#).) The idea here is that a co-development had occurred over a long period of time—of humans as biological entities, and their gatherer-hunter way of life. In effect, humans had become “designed” for this way of life. With the Agricultural Revolution, however, ways of life began to change, while human biology remained basically the same—so that a Discrepancy began to develop between (a) the way of life for which they had become “designed,” and (b) the way of life they actually led.

The implications of this Discrepancy have been explored by such scholars as [René Dubos](#), [Melvin Konner](#), and [Paul Shepard](#), and although none of them have commented on global

warming, so far as I know (Dubos and Shepard are now deceased), their thinking about The Discrepancy suggests the following hypothesis: *Virtually all of the problems that we humans have had since the Agricultural Revolution were/are rooted in The Discrepancy—the fact that we are forced to live lives that do not accord well with our “design specifications.” Of those various problems, global warming should not only be included, but should be recognized as the most important problem that we face currently.*

Now if our *way of life* is the ultimate source of our problems, the logical conclusion is that the only real solution to those problems—including the global warming one—is to *change* our way of life. Change it, that is, in the direction of one more “in tune” with our “design specifications.” This does not, of course, mean trying to recover a [Paleolithic](#) way of life once again. It *does*, however, mean (a) fully recognizing the threat posed by global warming, and the likelihood that (as Prof. [Kevin Anderson](#) has asserted) that global warming will wipe out most of the world’s population before this century is over; and (b) designing a new way of life based not only on the implications of that culling, but on human “design specifications,” (c) while striving to save as much of the good that civilization has to offer as possible.

The question that arises now is: Do the three WICCI statements quoted above reflect this sort of thinking? Let us, then, examine each of them from this standpoint:

1. WICCI “develops and recommends adaptation strategies that can be implemented by businesses, farmers, public health officials, municipalities, resource managers and other stakeholders.”

A tacit assumption underlying this statement is that our existing way of life will continue, despite global warming—an assumption likely to be proven false within a matter of decades.

2. “In general terms, adaptation is any sort of adjustment in human or natural systems that helps those systems survive changing conditions or become better suited to them.”

A tacit assumption here is that the systems referred to *can* survive the ravages that global warming is likely to inflict—again, an assumption likely to be proven false within a matter of decades.

3. “At a fundamental level, there are only two parts to [adaptation science](#); calculating the probability of a future event, and creating contingency plans for those events most likely to materialize. Adaptation should focus on the greatest vulnerabilities.”

This statement assumes that there *is* such a thing as “adaptation science”—but the authors of this statement only *assume* that such an animal exists. They claim that this science involves (a) calculating the probability that something will occur in the future, and then (b) developing

contingency plans for the expected occurrence. There are (at least) two problems with this “adaptation science,” however:

- It is not based on a view of the future that takes that future seriously enough—the high likelihood that global warming will, within a matter of decades, cause societies—including ours—to collapse, and that when *that* occurs, far more deaths will occur—to the point that it will be simply impossible for civilized living, as we know it today, to continue.
- The reference here to “plans” implicitly refers to plans developed by agencies such as WICCI. Given the above point, it’s highly likely that any “plans” that emerge from WICCI—or other governmental agencies, for that matter—will *not* be sufficient to match the *scope* of the problem.

Because I see no reason to reject Prof. Anderson’s projection that global warming will wipe out most of the world’s population within the next few decades, I see real urgency in recognizing that our survival as a species depends on (a) accepting this eventuality, and (b) acting on it in an appropriate manner.

As I believe it pointless to look to government for appropriate leadership, we must act as individuals and as leaders of private organizations. Doing what? Because the phenomena that comprise “global warming” will make life difficult, one will need to (a) move to a location that would appear to be “safe” (e.g., away from an oceanic coast), and (b) become as self-sufficient as one can be. The latter could mean becoming a homesteader, but I would especially advise people to create small communities with others as the best survival strategy—for the greater variety of skills available, and our need, as social animals, for the company of other human beings.

Those engaging in adaptive efforts of this sort are not *guaranteed* to survive—and, if Prof. Anderson is correct, most *won’t*. But this (overwhelmingly sad) possibility should not deter us from *trying* to survive.

On a [WICCI blog](#) I found this:

I recently asked Dan Vimont, a climate scientist I was interviewing, if he was worried.

He said no.

He said that when you are faced with uncertainty and you don’t have the tools to assess what could happen and how you can adapt—all you can do is worry. That is why we do research, he said.

This Mr. Vimont—a scientist, apparently!—may think that worrying is a good option; I do not!!

## **Christianity, “Jesuanism” . . . and Global Warming!**

Alton C. Thompson

This morning (February 4, 2013) I sent the following to Prof. Bart D. Ehrman, of the University of North Carolina:

The statement that the religion OF Jesus became, with Christianity, a religion ABOUT him: Who first made this statement? Did he, or someone else, then expand on this point? If so, is this available on the internet?

His response, shortly after I sent the above to him:

Great question! I don't know the answer. Seems like it must have been a German scholar in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—but that itself is just a guess. Sorry—I wish I knew!

The fact that he *didn't* know the answer to this question disappointed me, of course; but I guess that the important point here is that the religion of Jesus—let's call it “Jesuanism,” so that it has a name—gave rise to a number of religions/philosophies that claimed Jesus as the source of their inspiration, one of these being *Christianity*.

Use of the term “Christianity” carries with it the implication that that particular religion is, and has been, *monolithic* in character—which those who claim that label for themselves today would assert as patently absurd. For, they would point out, today there is Catholicism, Protestantism, and Orthodoxy (among other possibilities), with each of these—and especially Protestantism—consisting of various (what Protestant term) “denominations.” However, Christianity *once* was rather monolithic, in the sense that the Emperor [Constantine](#) [c272 – 337 CE; emperor from 306 – 337], in his [Edict of Milan](#) (313), declared that the various religions that existed in the Roman Empire should be tolerated (the ones that claimed Jesus as the source of their inspiration had been persecuted); and—of [more relevance](#)—“in 325 he summoned the [Council of Nicaea](#), effectively the first [Ecumenical Council](#) (unless the [Council of Jerusalem](#) is so classified). The Council of Nicaea is most known for its dealing with [Arianism](#) and for instituting the [Nicene Creed](#).”

By giving his support to the Nicene Creed, Constantine gave his support to *Christianity*—i.e., the only one of the various Jesus-inspired groups/philosophies existing at the time that warrants the label “Christianity.” There were many other Jesus-oriented groups at that time; indeed, [Epiphanius](#) [310-320 – 403 CE], in his [Penarion](#), written beginning in the 374-375 time frame (i.e., about 40 years after Constantine's death—and, of course, after the 325 Council of Nicaea), listed 80 “heresies” (!), 60 of them being Jesus-inspired groups/philosophies *other than*

Christianity. (One or more of these groups may have been a “Jesuan” one, but I have not done enough investigation of them to know one way or another; a part of the problem here, of course, is defining “Jesuanism”—something that I will be doing shortly.)

Although Constantine had “merely” given his support to Christianity, a later emperor—[Theodosius](#) [347 – 395; emperor from 379 to 395] went further:

On 27 February 380 he, together with [Gratian](#) and [Valentinian II](#) published the so-called "[Edict of Thessalonica](#)" (decree "*Cunctos populos*", [Codex Theodosianus xvi.1.2](#)) in order that all their subjects should profess the faith of the bishops of Rome and Alexandria (i.e., the Nicene faith). The move was mainly a thrust at the various beliefs that had arisen out of Arianism, but smaller dissident sects, such as the [Macedonians](#), were also prohibited.

That is, in 380 Theodosius made Christianity—i.e., that Jesus-oriented religion that had the [Nicene Creed](#) as its central doctrine—the official religion of the Roman Empire. *At that time*, then, and for centuries thereafter, Christianity was a (relatively) monolithic religion. The question that arises, however, is: Did this “Christianity” *continue* the religion of Jesus—i.e., was it the religion *of* Jesus—or, rather, was it “merely” a religion *about* Jesus?

Seemingly, the answer to this question is obvious: Given that its orientation was to a *creed*—i.e., it was *belief* oriented—it did not *continue* the religion of Jesus. However, such an answer must be regarded as a *tentative* one, in the absence of a clear definition of “the religion of Jesus.” Let me, then, provide such a definition.

The literature on Jesus is vast, and I can claim to have read but a small portion of it. However, the view that I have formulated regarding Jesus doesn’t match any of the views that I have encountered in my reading, so that my lack of reading extensively in the extant literature doesn’t have much relevance here.

Although I have read Elaine Pagels’s [The Gnostic Gospels](#) (1989) and related works, my conception of Jesus has been primarily formulated on the basis of the [four canonical gospels](#) (i.e., Mathew, Mark, Luke, John)—recognizing that these are all biased in being “Christian” books. Using those “gospels” as my primary source (and given that my reading in the literature has undoubtedly also influenced my thinking—but *how*, I am not able to articulate), I have developed the following brief perspective on Jesus:

- He was raised in Judaism, his knowledge of the contents of Jewish Scripture coming from hearing it read and discussed—for, being illiterate, he was not able to read it.
- He came to perceive that Scripture—and the practices associated with the Judaism of his time—as containing both “wheat” and “chaff.” (*Why* is another matter.)
- He came to perceive the *behavioral rules* of Judaism as constituting the religion’s

“wheat,” but with much of it *also* being “chaff.”

- He came to conclude that there is but one behavioral rule of importance—“love your neighbor”—and used his “ministry” to inform those who would listen regarding what that command *meant*.
- Implicit in this “reductionism” was that his religion had no need for priests! (The religious leaders of his society presumably were intelligent enough to *realize* this about Jesus’s “preaching,” which caused them to recognize that he represented a potential threat to their livelihood—so that they convinced the Romans to get rid of him, which then happened.)

Note that *beliefs* play no role in this religion—even beliefs about *God* (i.e., *whether* God exists, God’s *characteristics*, etc.). For if one love’s the neighbor, one does not first ask oneself about the neighbor’s *beliefs*—a point that is implicit in the famous [Good Samaritan parable](#) attributed to him.

But what if one is being *abused* by the neighbor? Even then, Jesus is quoted as saying, is one to love the neighbor—by [turning the other cheek](#). This part of the love command is, admittedly, a “hard” one to follow; indeed, I believe that a better principle is “Defend yourself if attacked, but in doing so try to not harm the attacker.” At a *national* level, the “turn the other cheek” principle is one that the United States has never given the slightest consideration! Indeed, we have become the world’s *premier* abusers! And although we have a Department of Defense, we rarely have a need, nationally, to engage in *defensive* activities—so that, “naturally” (!), under the “use it or lose it principle,” we use that Department for *offensive* purposes—in both senses of the word “offensive”!

Or, what if one’s neighbor is abusing a *family member*, other relative, or friend—or *anyone* else, for that matter? I, for one, would not permit myself to “hold back” in such a case, and would feel no guilt in doing so; however, I would hope that in doing so I prevented, or minimized, the neighbor’s abuse in a manner that was not (especially) hurtful to the neighbor. For I would hope that in so doing, my neighbor would respect me for not harming him, would feel guilt regarding what s/he had tried to do—and become a different person. So that a form of love actually won out in the end.

The above, then, is how I have come to perceive what Jesus was “about;” and it should be clear from what I have said above that ***there is no basis for thinking of the Christianity of Theodosius’s time—i.e., the Nicene Creed version—as in any way continuing the religion of Jesus.*** In fact, to *claim* that it did would be utterly blasphemous!

What is called “Christianity” *today* is much more varied than the Nicene Christianity of Epiphanius’s day, but I am not aware of any strand of it that might qualify as “Jesuan”—

although [Quakerism](#) would appear to be a major exception. I regard [NeWFism](#) as definitely “Jesuan”—but NeWFism is a religion that exists only “on paper” so far, not in actuality. (I should note here that the *word* “NeWFism” is derived from “New Word Fellowship,” the central *institution* of NeWFism.)

One might argue, I suppose, that one can be a Jesuan without being a member of an organized group comprised of other Jesuans—and I am in full agreement with that position. However, as an advocate of NeWFism I believe that there is *value* in meeting, on a regular basis, with other Jesuans—for strengthening one’s commitment to Jesuanism, developing ideas and plans (and *acting* on same)—and simply socializing. (For a fuller discussion of this matter see pp. 49 - 60 of my “[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#).”) Following the pattern of “regular” church meetings (erroneously referred to as “services”) is, of course, out of the question (see my “[The Blasphemy of Church ‘Services’](#)”).

I would guess that the thinking of most people associated with Christianity today (with the exception of Biblical and religious scholars) has been so colored by their experience with Christianity, that they are unable to understand that the religion that they have been exposed to bears little relationship to the religion of Jesus; the very *name* given to their religion refers to a *title* given to Jesus—“Christ”—rather than Jesus himself. Had they been exposed to Jesuanism they would—assuming that they were unfortunate enough to have clergy—have been tutored in the love command, and the idea that because everyone is different in various respects, this command should—and will—mean something different to each individual. However, what Christian clergy do is orient their congregants to Bible passages, creeds, rituals—seemingly anything that will *divert* their attention from the love command. Yet the congregants are led to believe that the religion that they are practicing *is* Jesuan—and it’s likely that even some clergy are ignorant and stupid enough to believe such (blasphemous) nonsense!

I recall, as an example, a recent church “service” that I attended during which the minister discussed the famous passage in Matthew 25 about feeding the hungry, etc., and at the end of the “service” asked those present to repeat, with her, the Nicene Creed—meaning that even the *minister* (who holds a doctoral degree in theology!) didn’t realize that she was mixing “apples and wrenches”—an *orthopraxy* version of religion with an *orthodoxy* one. What a pathetic comment to make! [1] But I suspect that such confusion is endemic with lay people and professionals alike in that swampland known as “Christianity.”

Finally, as one with a “practical” bent, I would insist that in addressing the problem of global warming which faces us currently—and will become *more* of a problem in the future—the NeWF (or its “secular” equivalent, the Structured Interaction Group, or SIG—see my [eBook](#)) could be an important “tool.” What especially recommends the NeWF/SIG for this purpose is that participation in one of these institutions can lead to *creative* ideas—and if there is anything



we need today, it is not more (alleged) answers from *scientists*, but answers—creative ones, in particular—from “regular” people! Science can describe, and often explain, how things *are*, and often make reasonable projections as to what *will be*. But when it comes to the question of what *should be*, one’s values—and creativity—should play the dominant role. They *will* anyway, but too often decisions are made on the basis of values of which the decision-maker lacks awareness.

## Endnote

1. Recently, while delivering a “children’s sermon,” she referred to the fact that we all have been given “gifts,” but neglected to mention (using language appropriate for the age group) that the *purpose* in being given gifts is to use them to somehow contribute to the general welfare, rather than personal gain. It would seem, therefore, that not only does this pastor have a weak grasp of the nature of Jesuanism, but does not realize that recent research (done, e.g., at the [Greater Good center](#) associated with the University of California, Berkeley, has demonstrate that doing for others tends to bring a sense of satisfaction to *oneself* as well.

This latter fact—in conjunction with the fact that our society’s dominant values are the “holy trinity” of greed, materialism, and selfishness—reveals how peculiar our society is: *Unnatural* behavior is prized over *natural* behavior—despite the fact that we are “designed” to receive satisfaction from *natural* behavior.

## **[“Dumping On” Christianity \(Again!\)](#)**

Alton C. Thompson

An important theme in what Christians refer to as the “New Testament” is people not *understanding* what they *hear* (the [disciples in Mark’s gospel](#)) or what they *read* (e.g., the story of [Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in the book of Acts](#)). But what was stated regarding the disciples of Jesus and the eunuch centuries ago, also applies to Christians today—a fact illustrated by, e.g., the famous [Good Samaritan parable](#) attributed to Jesus.

This parable can be perceived as conveying, to those hearing or reading it, his concept of “being religious.” And what’s important about this parable is not just what it *says*, but what it does *not* say:

- Regard the Samaritan’s actions as an *example* of what it means to be religious—which is to have a loving *attitude* toward all others (and not just *human* others), and to *act* on that attitude to the best of one’s ability.
- Given my use of a story to convey this message, and the fact that parables require *interpretation*, I want *you*—the hearer or reader—to interpret this story in a manner that is meaningful to *you*, given your intelligence, education, experiences, current situation, etc., the nature of the society—and the “times”—in which you live, etc. (See also Paul’s [comments in I Corinthians](#).)
- Interpreted by the modern person, recognize that my message does *not* require you to:
  - Meet with like-minded others on a regular basis—although this would be advisable.
  - If you *do* choose to meet with like-minded others on a regular basis, to *not*:
    - ❖ Have a clergy—for delivering sermons, and performing other duties.
    - ❖ Require all in your group to believe in God.
    - ❖ Expect—*require*, indeed—all members of the groups to accept (or claim to!) a certain set of statements as “true.”
    - ❖ During meetings *not* have:

- Bible readings.
- Rituals for all to participate in.
- Liturgies—whether read responsively or not.
- Prayers.
- Hymn singing.[1]

Not only is there no *need* for any of the above (in the “not” category, that is); *having* one or more of them will tend to *distract* one’s attention from what’s important—the law of love—and is, therefore, a grievous *sin*!—warranting placement in [Dante’s Ninth Circle](#) (that of Treachery)! For to mislead people as to the *true nature* of my teaching—whether done intentionally or not—is the worst sort of treachery!

In addition, there is the less obvious point (perhaps) that the presence of one or more of the above distractive elements in a religion is to “[aid and abet](#)” the . . . Existing Order—an Order whose hierarchical, inequalitarian nature would be directly contrary to an Order based on the religion of Jesus.[2]

Needless to say, with the exception of the [Quakers](#), there appears to be no version of what goes under the label “Christianity” today that promulgates the religion of Jesus. True, Christianity is *about* Jesus, but that does not make it *of* Jesus—a point that even a fool should be able to comprehend. Christianity is the religion *of* Jesus to a degree, but its *about* component so overpowers the *of* component as to render the *of* component impotent. A pathetic comment to make about Christianity, of course!

It’s certainly possible, even likely, that at least one of the many “Jesus groups” that arose after Jesus’s death *continued* the religion of Jesus. (Little good evidence exists for these groups.) But with [Constantine](#)’s “conversion” to [Nicene Christianity](#), and [Theodosius](#)’s making that version of Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, those Jesus groups that attempted to continue the religion of Jesus (those within the Empire, in particular) could continue that religion only in secret—if their members had an interest in surviving!

If, over the centuries, Christianity was serving the interests of the Existing Order (it *was*!), this was unintentional, as the theology that had developed was not *explicitly* favorable to the Existing Order. This changed, however, with the so-called “Reformation.” With [Martin Luther’s](#) creation of the idea “that [salvation](#) is not earned by good deeds but received only as a free gift of God’s [grace](#) through [faith](#) in [Jesus Christ](#) as redeemer from sin,” and his invention of the concept of a “calling” (i.e., having a God-given vocation), this changed.[3] And given that still later,

[Adam Smith](#), in his *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), introduced the concept of an “[invisible hand](#)”—asserting thereby that if each individual pursues his/her private interests, the public good will be realized, this ensured by “the market,” so long as “market forces” are not interfered with by government[4]—everyone, *Christians included*, now had “substantial” theoretical support (ostensibly, at any rate) for engaging in self-interested behavior with a clear conscience.

The advantage of being guided, in one’s behavior, by a *theory*—although “ideology” would be a more apt term here—is that because the theory asserts that self-interested behavior *must* result in advancing the common good, it *does*. That is, it is not necessary to obtain *empirical evidence* to support such a belief because the relevant theory clearly states what must be: Just as [Aristotle argued that females had fewer teeth than males](#), because this *had* to be true, so does Smithian-influenced thinking permit people to believe that self-interested (i.e., *greedy!*) behavior serves the public good—*despite abundant empirical evidence to the contrary*. I am reminded here of the famous statement of [Groucho Marx](#): “Who are you going to believe, me or your lying eyes?”

When expressed in Marx’s (Groucho, *not* Karl!) humorous manner, the absurdity of believing—in this case—that greedy behavior serves the public’s interest becomes obvious. However, because most of those who identify with Christianity, rather than being “[separated from the world](#),” are an *integral part* of it, most Christians live their lives unaware that the religion they practice has virtually *nothing in common* with the religion of Jesus. And it’s also highly likely that most members of the Christian clergy are unaware of the blasphemy that they engage in Sunday after Sunday.

Can this situation be changed? I would answer this question in the negative, arguing that any major religion tends to reflect—and help support, if but inadvertently—the society that “houses” it. There *are*, however, at least two possibilities:

- Global warming will cause societies—including ours, of course—to collapse; and as a massive culling of the world’s population occurs, with most societies collapsing in consequence, the various components of societies—including religions, such as Christianity—will disappear.
- Some will anticipate disaster ahead, caused by global warming, and will begin creating a New Society within the shell of the Existing Order(s). In creating this society, the [New Word Fellowship](#) (NeWF) will be used for planning purposes, and will be *continued* in use (for making decisions, discussing ideas, even just socializing) during the process of the New Society’s creation—and after. Given that *this* society will be an egalitarian one, the [NeWFism](#) then prevailing (which could also be labeled “Jesuanism”) will “mesh” perfectly with the nature of the society being created. In this case, what will occur is that there will be a simultaneous occurrence of Existing Order collapse and New Society creation.

Which of these possibilities is the most likely? The first one, I suppose, but I hope that a New Society movement is initiated—so that not only will more people survive the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us humans, but that humans—*all* of the survivors—will be able to have a decent life (insofar as that’s *possible*).

## Endnotes

- 1 The “bare bones” nature of this religious “philosophy” may remind some of a famous passage in [Amos \(5:21 – 24\)](#):

<sup>21</sup> “I hate, I despise your religious festivals;  
your assemblies are a stench to me.

<sup>22</sup> Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,  
I will have no regard for them.

<sup>23</sup> Away with the noise of your songs!  
I will not listen to the music of your harps.

<sup>24</sup> But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream!

2. Another name that might be given to this “Order” is “[Kingdom of God](#),” where “kingdom” is interpreted as referring not to a geographical entity, but to God’s *kingship*, with God’s “kingship” being understood as occurring wherever the law of love is *recognized* as the primary law that should govern one’s behavior, and *followed* to the best of one’s ability. Note that this interpretation is an *individualistic* one that becomes a *collective* one, however, with a *group*, all of whose members are committed to the love command (“[where two or three are gathered](#) . . .”).
3. Two noted works on this subject are [Max Weber’s \*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism\*](#) (1905), and [Richard H. Tawney’s \*Religion and the Rise of Capitalism\*](#) (1926).
4. Some may have thought of this “invisible hand” as being the hand of God, although I cannot cite any evidence in support of this suggestion. It can be noted that Smith “first introduced the concept in [The Theory of Moral Sentiments](#), written in 1759. In this work, however, the idea of the market is not discussed, and the word ‘[capitalism](#)’ is never used.” It should be noted that the fact that Smith published his *Moral Sentiments* book almost 20 years before publishing *Wealth* suggests that Smith did not favor unbridled greed. Also see on this matter Jerry Z. Muller’s [Adam Smith in His Time and Ours](#) (1993), for example.

## **Some Friday Morning Thoughts**

Alton C. Thompson

When I wrote my [“Why Would We \*NOT\* Want Our Society to Collapse?!”](#) I listed—of the almost endless possibilities!—some of the reasons for welcoming our society’s imminent (i.e., within a few decades) collapse. And although the reasons that I cited in that essay are not unimportant, perhaps the major reason for “praying” for our society’s collapse is the military adventurism that our government has been engaging in for decades.

Today I received Bill Blum’s latest [Anti-Empire Report](#), and Bill included a link to a video that should not only anger any citizen of the United States—any human being, for that matter!—but make any citizen deeply ashamed to be associated with such an evil country. The video is two hours in length, and here is a link to it: <http://vimeo.com/55141496>. (If you are asked for a password, it is “barbarasteegmuller”.)

In his newsletter, Bill noted that he had received the following comment from one of his readers (who chose to remain anonymous):

It is my opinion that the German and Japanese people only relinquished their imperial culture and mindset when they were bombed back to the stone age at the end of WWII. Something similar is the only cure for the same pathology that now is embedded into the very social fabric of the USA. The USA is a full-blown pathological society now. There is no other cure. No amount of articles on the Internet pointing out the hypocrisies or war crimes will do it.

I immediately wrote a response to Bill, stating the following:

I would add a more realistic—and potentially better—solution to this problem: The World Bank’s recent [climate change report](#) states (p. xiii) “If they [“current mitigation commitments and pledges”] are not met, a warming of 4°C could occur as early as the 2060s.” Prof. Kevin Anderson (of Britain’s Tyndal Centre, and an advisor to the British government) would add that such an increase would be [“devastating”](#) for our species.

Given that we are on course for a 4 degree C increase in the global mean by the 2060s, and this is likely to mean a severe culling of the world’s population between now and then, our society is likely to collapse within a few decades—and our imperial adventurism will then cease of necessity. Thus, no need to bomb our society back into the Stone Age, Nature will be doing the equivalent of bombing—although the reason Nature will be doing this is that our activities (burning of fossil fuels in particular) have so “messed up” Nature that Nature had no choice but to do what the laws of physics dictate that it do.

What individuals and private organizations should be doing is begin to engage in adaptive activities in an attempt to survive the coming “holocaust”—but we humans don’t seem to have the brains to “see the handwriting on the wall,” and respond intelligently to that “handwriting.”

I agree with [Dave Lindorff](#) that Pres. O’Bomber should be impeached; do you?

It’s currently 9:35 in the morning (of February 8, 2013), so it’s too early for Bill to have replied to my email. But I know that he will, and I’m curious to see what his response will be.

Twenty-nine years ago I published an article—“[Ecotopia: A ‘Gerendipitous’ Scenario](#)”—that presented a scenario/strategy for societal system change, one based on what might be termed a “starve the beast” philosophy. In the article I postulated a 5-“wave” scenario of change that drew upon migration theory—in that it was a “pull-push-pull-push-drag” scenario. I referred to it as a “gerendipitous” scenario because the first two “waves” were to be comprised of retirees.

In addition to be based on migration theory, the scenario/strategy was based on the fact that our society is highly *interdependent* from an economic standpoint. It occurred to me that it was possible—at least conceivably—to “take advantage” of this interdependence to attain an ecological goal: If (a) small communities designed to be “community-sufficient” were to be created, (b) with none of the activities in those communities being polluting, and (c) there were to be a proliferation of such communities, over time the support for polluters in our society would be gradually removed—a point being reached where they would be forced to “cease and desist.” A tacit assumption here is that a similar process would be occurring elsewhere in the world, so that polluting firms in the United States would not be able to continue, because they would have no market—either here or abroad.

In designing my scenario/strategy, I tried to make it *believable*—one actually capable of realization—and I continue to perceive it that way. It did not, of course, get implemented—for I lacked, and still do, the resources to “get the ball rolling,” but if it *had* been implemented, I’m convinced that it would have “worked,” and that we would not be faced with the threat of annihilation via global warming that we are currently faced with.

When I wrote my “Ecotopia” article in 1984, my primary concern was the damage that we were inflicting on the environment (directly)—and ourselves (indirectly). Today, I’m convinced that it’s too late to halt the continued “progress” of global warming, but that does not mean that there aren’t other reasons for wanting societal system change—via, e.g., the scenario/strategy that I published 29 years ago.

Two reasons strike me as particularly important as I write today. One is the fact that a *positive* feature of societal collapse (resulting from global warming) is that our military would lose its support, and thereby be forced to collapse (which would make millions of people happy—were it not for the culling of global warming). Second, imminent collapse of our society gives us the opportunity to anticipate this, and start engaging in adaptive activities—such as the creation of

small cooperative communities—that will give us some hope for surviving the calamity that lies ahead; in creating these communities, we *need* to design with global warming in mind, but also *should* design with human “design specifications” (see Chapters 2 – 4 in my [eBook](#)) in mind—so that a decent life can be provided for all of those who are able to survive the ravages of global warming.



## Did the Seinfeld Show Reflect America?

Alton C. Thompson

Morris Berman, in his recent “[A Show About Nothing](#),” stated the following (among many other statements, of course):

there is an undercurrent in the episodes, one which says that the United States is a country in which friendship is pretty much a sham and community nonexistent; a society where nobody gives a damn about anybody else.

the show is actually about the callousness, the almost autistic indifference, of daily life in America; and this is revealed in episode after episode.

As if to deliberately mock the notion of community (or lack thereof), there is an episode in which Kramer takes photos of everyone in the apartment building and posts them, along with the corresponding name of each person, on the wall of the foyer, just inside the entrance. The idea is that the residents will now be able to greet each other by name. The whole thing is too phony to be believed . . . .

When Jerry phones his lawyer, “Jackie Chiles” (a Johnnie Cochran look-alike), to explain that they were arrested for not coming to someone’s aid, Jackie explodes with indignation: “Why, that’s ridiculous!” he barks. “You don’t have to help *anybody*. That’s what this country is all about!” As the popular American expression has it, He got that one right.

What the show tells us, in episode after episode, is that callous disregard for other human beings *is* the foundation of society—American society, that is. And so the subtext finally breaks through in no uncertain terms: *Seinfeld* was A Show About Something, after all.

I guess that I am naïve, but I will admit that I used to watch the *Seinfeld* television show, and enjoyed it—and it never dawned on me that this was a commentary on American society. Whether this is because I’m not Jewish—like Berman, or the characters on the show—or because I’m just not very perceptive, I’ll don’t know. But the question that I am led to ask, after reading Berman’s article, is: ***Is, and has been, the United States really as rotten a country as the Seinfeld show suggests?***

I will admit that if one’s focus is on our foreign policy, I would agree that our country’s political leaders have been “nothing to write home about.” Any reader of [Bill Blum’s web site](#) or General Smedley D. Butler’s [War is a Racket](#), or viewer of Barbara-Anne Steegmuller’s [recent 2-hour video](#) (password: “barbarasteegmuller”), would, of necessity, be forced to admit that American imperialism has been the most vicious the world has ever known. But are the characterizations

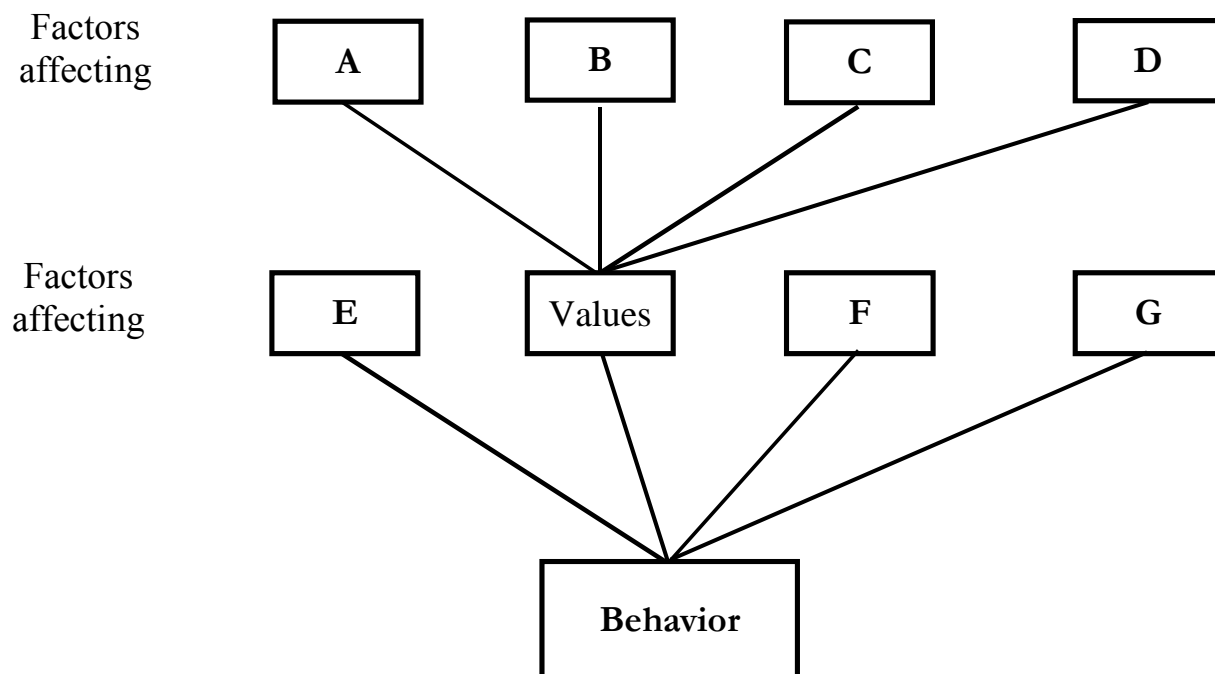
of the American people—as inferred by Berman from the *Seinfeld* TV show—applicable to the vast *majority* of Americans?

I would hate to think that I am Berman’s “typical American,” but I must admit that I am likely not entirely *free* of those traits; certainly I know that I am by no means the person that I would like to be. In my essays on this site, more than once have I declared that the dominant values in this society are the “holy trinity” of greed, materialism, and selfishness. Am I now “backing off” on this claim—and even *retracting* what I had written earlier? Or, rather, is there a need for me to *clarify* my thinking on this matter further than I have done so far on this site? (Yes, there is!)

Let me start here by noting that it [has been said](#) of Milton Rokeach’s *The Nature of Human Values*, 1973, that:

This book is concerned with the problem of human values. The findings reported here suggest that the concept of values, more than any other, is the core concept across all the social sciences. It is the main dependent variable in the study of culture, society, and personality, and the main independent variable in the study of social attitudes and behavior.

Reading this statement caused me to create the following chart:



What this chart “says” is that Values have been studied as a dependent variable in many social science studies (i.e., as a phenomenon—or set of phenomena) potentially *explained by* various independent (“explanatory”) variables; but that Values have also been used—along with other factors—as an “independent” variable to *explain* Behavior (among other possibilities). Note, relative to this, that Berman—in referring to “not giving a damn,” “callousness,” “phoniness,” not “helping,” and “callous disregard”—was referring to *behaviors*, but *implicit* in Berman’s

discussion is the suggestion that the *reason* for these objectionable (they *are* such, in *my* value system, at any rate!) behaviors is the *twisted value systems* of the individuals being played—bearing out the “main dependent variable” reference in the Abstract referred to above.

Questions that arise here, however, are: What *are* values? And: Are the values that were implicit in the *Seinfeld* episodes reflective of the values held by most Americans?

[One definition](#) of “values” is this: “Values can be defined as broad preferences concerning appropriate courses of action or outcomes.” For a list of 418 (what the author claims to be) values, see [this site](#)! The *concept* of “values” is, however, problematic, for although I know—to some degree, at least—*my* values, I also know that my *behavior* does not always accord with those values. How is this to be interpreted? Does it mean that *several* factors influence my behavior, my *values* being one of them? Or does it mean that the fact that I have acted in a manner discordant with what I claim as my values proves that I don’t *have* those values after all?!

Where the problem arises especially here is determining the values of *someone else*. I could, for example, provide someone with the list of 418 values referred to above, and ask that person to select those items on the list that s/he can “relate” to, and to also then *rank* them from most to least important. If that person then gives me a copy of the list, and I begin observing the person’s behavior, and found significant discrepancies, how should I interpret those discrepancies? Do they mean that the person has been *untruthful* in providing me with her/his list, or does it mean that factors *other than* values have, at times, affected that person’s behavior.

Given that I know, from examining my *own* behavior, that I do not always act in accord with what I *claim* as my values, I find it easy to believe the same regarding this person being observed. The problem, however, is that I can’t look into that person’s mind to determine if s/he was honest in providing me with the list that s/he provided me. Given this fact, I don’t know which way to turn, and may conclude that the most *reliable* clues regarding the other’s values are to be obtained from observing the other’s behavior—and then *inferring* the person’s values from her/his behavior. This, despite the fact that taking this approach does not convince me fully.

The point that I am trying to get across here is that I now realize that I have been somewhat glib in claiming that the dominant values in this society are greed, materialism, and selfishness. These values are often *claimed* for Americans—and are *implicitly* so claimed in Berman’s article—but I am now forced to admit that I’m not at all sure that good evidence exists in support of that claim. I’ll admit that there *may* be literature “out there” that addresses this matter competently—but of which I am unaware; but the fact that I am *not* aware of that literature makes me *doubt* that good evidence exists—something that I am embarrassed to admit.

Still, in my reading about members of this society, I find it easy to believe that in the [upper middle class](#) in particular it seems reasonable to *infer* that greed, materialism, and selfishness are

the dominant values: *Given that I am not aware of factors other than values that might explain the behaviors that seem common with members of this class, it is reasonable to conclude that it is the values factor that basically explains those behaviors.*

Fortunately, only a small percent of the American population is upper middle class (*I am not in that group!*), and although undesirable traits seem often to be associated with many at the lower end of the socio-economic scale (for no fault of their own, however!), I would like to think that more positive traits are associated with those of us who are more “middlin’.” For an abundance of evidence—which for me is highly relevant—I would recommend John Curl’s [\*For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America\*](#) (2009).

Thus, although I believe that negative traits are associated with the *dominant* element of our society (unfortunately!), millions in our society have positive traits. Would that *they* were the dominant element of our society!

## ***Can a “Moral Order” Be Established?***

Alton C. Thompson

When I saw the title of Morris Berman’s recent “[The Moral Order](#),” my first thought was that the article would make reference to [Robert Owen](#) [1771 – 1858]—his 1813 *A New View of Society: Essays on the Formation of Human Character* in particular. Owen, it will be recalled, engaged in notable social experimentation at [New Lanark](#) (which “became a successful business and an epitome of [utopian socialism](#) as well as an early example of a planned settlement and so an important milestone in the historical development of [urban planning](#)), and for purchasing [Harmonie](#), Indiana, from “Father” [Georg Rapp](#), renaming it “[New Harmony](#).” [1] In reading the article, however, I learned that it made no reference to Owen—or any other “[utopians](#).”

What concerns Berman is that “the modern industrial-corporate-consumer state, . . . expands technologically and economically, but to no other end than expansion itself. As the sociologist [Georg Simmel](#) wrote over a century ago, if you make money the center of your value system, then finally you *have* no value system, because money is not a value.” He adds: “there is no real meaning in the corporate-consumer state, which is at once empty and idiotic. On some level, everybody knows this.” And what’s particularly pathetic about this “fact” is that this is not a new phenomenon:

the technical order is meaningless; . . . the American Way of Life finally has no moral center. Indeed, it is not clear that it ever did. In *Freedom Just Around the Corner*, historian Walter McDougall characterizes the United States as a “nation of hustlers,” going back to its earliest days. What began as trade and opportunism finally issued out into a full-blown crisis of meaning, and it is this that now constitutes the crisis of late capitalism.

Berman then shifts his discussion to a consideration of an [article](#) by [Benjamin R. Barber](#), published in *The Nation* in 2009. Barber had begun *his* article by stating:

As America, recession mired, enters the hope-inspired age of Barack Obama, a silent but fateful struggle for the soul of capitalism is being waged. Can the market system finally be made to serve us? Or will we continue to serve it? George W. Bush argued that the crisis is “not a failure of the free-market system, and the answer is not to try to reinvent that system.” But while it is going too far to declare that capitalism is dead, [George Soros](#) is right when he says that “there is something fundamentally wrong” with the market theory that stands behind the global economy, a “defect” that is “inherent in the system.”

Barber’s answer to the problem:

The crisis in global capitalism demands a revolution in spirit—fundamental change in attitudes and behavior. Reform cannot merely rush parents and kids back into the mall; it must

encourage them to shop less, to save rather than spend. If there's to be a federal lottery, the Obama administration should use it as an incentive for saving, a free ticket, say, for every ten bucks banked. Penalize carbon use by taxing gas so that it's \$4 a gallon regardless of market price, curbing gas guzzlers and promoting efficient public transportation. And how about policies that give producers incentives to target real needs, even where the needy are short of cash, rather than to manufacture faux needs for the wealthy just because they've got the cash?

But despite this need:

it is hard to discern any movement toward a wholesale rethinking of the dominant role of the market in our society. No one is questioning the impulse to rehabilitate the consumer market as the driver of American commerce. Or to keep commerce as the foundation of American public and private life, even at the cost of rendering other cherished American values—like pluralism, the life of the spirit and the pursuit of (nonmaterial) happiness—subordinate to it.

Indeed, *Berman* adds that various scholars and intellectuals who had compared modern existence with “primitive” existence (e.g., [Max Weber](#), [Ferdinand Tönnies](#), [Edward Sapir](#), [Robert Redfield](#))—to the advantage of “primitive” existence!—had been rather pessimistic about the possibilities for change. Redfield, for example, “believed that while the human race had made great advances in the technical order, it had made virtually no progress in the moral order—the knowledge of how to live, as it were—and that because of this, the human prospect was rather dim.” Indeed, scholars/intellectuals such as [Franz Boas](#), [Arthur Koestler](#), [Jacques Ellul](#), and [Lewis Mumford](#) “could see no way of reversing the direction of historical development. It was obvious [to them] that as time went on, the technical order was not merely overtaking the moral order, but actually obliterating it.”

Barber had declared that “It's time, finally, for a cabinet-level arts and humanities post to foster creative thinking within government as well as throughout the country.” And Berman, referring to this statement by Barber, had added: “Professor Barber must know that substantive political change is not a matter of voluntarism or exhortatory messages or some purported cabinet post in the arts. These are little more than jokes. To buck 200-plus years of history (or, as I argue in [Why America Failed](#), 400-plus) requires massive political power moving in the opposite direction, and no such force has emerged on the horizon.”

Despite Berman's seeming providing of a solution to our not having a “moral order” (“massive political power moving in the opposite direction”), his conclusion is utterly pessimistic:

There is no record of a dying civilization reassessing its values (or lack of values, in our case) and altering its trajectory. Whether the type of moral order that Professor Barber has in mind actually exists, or might someday exist somewhere on the planet, is certainly worth debating. But what is *not* worth debating is whether such a moral order might make an appearance on American soil. History is about many things, but one thing it is not about is miracles.

I agree with fellow geographer [Jared Diamond](#) that [societies do collapse](#), and that environmental factors have played a role—but that other factors have played a role as well (a matter that Berman would emphasize regarding the present). And although I know that *past* societies have collapsed—and I’m convinced that *ours* will as well within a few decades—my views differ from both Diamond and Berman (and also Barber) in that I believe that:

- It is *global warming* this time that will not only cause our society (among most others) to collapse, but will cause most of the world’s population to be [wiped out](#).
- If some of us (a) recognize that it is now too late to halt the further “progress” of global warming (given that we have either passed the “tipping point,” or soon will), so that (b) our only option now is that of trying to *adapt* to the ravages that global warming is likely to inflict on us, doing so by (c) trying to realize some semblance of the New Society envisioned by Robert Owen (i.e., one having small communities as its “building blocks”—what [Charles Fourier](#) referred to as “[phalanxes](#)”—such as the [Wisconsin Phalanx](#)), those taking this option—that of working to create a New Society—will increase their chance of survival.

This will be a “reversing” (to allude to Boaz, etc.) of sorts—and because we can *conceive* this, it is in the realm of *possibility*. I should add, however, that despite Berman’s reference to “massive political power” being applied to (possibly) bring about “reversal,” the fact of the matter is that only a fool would look to government for leadership here: Leadership, rather, will need to come from private individuals and organizations—if, that is, anything is to happen!

In working to create a New Society (*set* of societies, actually) those doing so should not only do their design work and location decision-making with global warming in mind, but also human “design specifications” (see Chapters 2 – 4 of my [eBook](#)). These “design specifications” came into being over a long period of time while humans were gatherer-hunters, but with the Agricultural Revolution ways of life began to change—with human biology, however, making no commensurate change. As a consequence, a Discrepancy arose—and widened (especially after the Industrial Revolution that began around 1750 CE)—between the way of life for which we had become *designed* and the way of life that we *actually lived* (were *forced* to live, in most cases). Conceivably, this Discrepancy is the ultimate cause of virtually all of our problems as humans (a matter that I have commented on in earlier essays on this site)—so that moving in the direction of a way of life more *in accord with our design specifications* should be near the “top of the list” of those planning this New Society. (Note that doing so does not mean trying to recover a [Paleolithic](#) way of life!)

I would emphasize that shopping, e.g., would be a virtually non-existent activity in the New Society that I envision—a fact that should please Barber. For in his 2009 article he had said:



“Imagine all the things we could do without having to shop: play and pray, create and relate, read and walk, listen and procreate—make art, make friends, make homes, make love.” And much more, of course. For if we were to work at creating a New Society that would be both adapted to global warming (insofar as that’s possible!) *and* have its economy as our *slave*—rather than *master*, which is what it *has* been!—we would finally be able to fully realize ourselves as humans.

The tragedy here, of course, is that we would be embarking on this endeavor at a point in history when global warming—a *problem of our own making!*—will be culling the world’s population severely, within a matter of decades. Had we begun this “project” when [Barry Commoner](#) began to warn us of the dangers posed by global warming, using the “strategy” that I proposed in a [1984 article](#), we would not be facing the prospect of significant culling now. But, as [the saying](#) goes, “There’s no use crying over spilt milk.” Those of us aware of the terrible danger ahead, must “push on”—by trying to alert others of those dangers, developing courses of action designed to address the problem, and acting on the solutions that we create to the best of our abilities.

Solutions may very well be developed by individuals acting alone, but I would especially encourage those interested in the “salvation” to which I am referring to use the New Word Fellowship (NeWF) or its secularized equivalent—the Structured Interaction Group (SIG)—for such a purpose. (The former is discussed, pp. 41 – 60, in my “[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#),” written under the name James B. Gray; the latter in my [What are Churches For?](#), pp. 159 – 164.) I believe that NeWF/SIG participation can have a host of beneficial effects, both for participants as individuals and for the group as a whole (see pp. 49 – 60 in my “Worship” paper), among them creative solutions to problems. And if there is ever a time when creative solutions are needed, it is the present!—when the global warming problem looms over us, and threatens to virtually annihilate us.

An advantage of the NeWF/CIG is that it can be used not only for the making of *planning* decisions but *operational*—and other—decisions as well. Plus, as new members are added to the group, it can play an extremely useful role in helping people get acquainted—and to grow to not only respect one another, but to like, and even love, one another. And in developing such a stance for members *within* the group, one will find it “natural” to develop such an orientation to those *outside* the group as well.

What must be especially emphasized here is that time is slipping away; the longer we delay, the greater the chance that not only will global warming (i.e., *us*—given that it is *us* who are responsible for global warming!) wipe out even more species than it has already, but that one of those species will be our own!



## Endnote

1. Several years ago a friend and I visited New Harmony, and our viewing of a map while there resulted in our writing "[On the Trail of Economy](#)." Since writing the paper I have discovered a few problems with it, but have been unable to motivate myself to redo the paper.

## [My Disagreement with Hartmann-Sacks](#)

Alton C. Thompson

Thom Hartmann and Sam Sacks conclude their recent “[Ayn Rand: Queen of the Universe](#)” with these words:

Idaho State Senator John Goedde, who chairs that state Senate’s Education Committee, introduced a bill this week that would require all students to read Ayn Rand’s book “Atlas Shrugged” before they can graduate. Goedde explained that the book made his son a Republican and that it “certainly gives one a sense of personal responsibility.”

Between stupidity like this, and the re-birth of Ayn Rand through corporate-funded think tanks and Hollywood movies, the Billionaire Class wants to make sure the next generation buys into a toxic ideology that’s quite literally destroying the world as we know it.

They don’t want the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to be “America’s Century.” They want it to be the “Billionaire’s Century.” And if they succeed, then the middle class in America - and through most of the developed world - will go extinct.

I share their disgust with Sen. Goedde’s effort to make [Rand](#)’s *[Atlas Shrugged](#)* required reading in Idaho before a student can graduate (from high school, I assume). And I agree with Alan Wolfe that her rise has been “[ridiculous](#).” In addition, although it’s true—as Hartmann and Sacks note—that Rand has grown in popularity, this fact is also [highly ironic](#):

The importance of Ayn Rand for modern conservatism would be difficult to underestimate. This has always been ironic given her staunch atheism, something that is completely at odds with almost everything in conservatism in America today. Less ironic is the recent revelation that Ayn Rand was a hypocrite: she secretly accepted government assistance instead of relying on the proceeds of all those books in which she decried government assistance.

A heavy smoker who refused to believe that smoking causes cancer brings to mind those today who are equally certain there is no such thing as global warming. Unfortunately, Miss Rand was a fatal victim of lung cancer.

What’s ironic, that is, about Rand’s rise in popularity is that:

- She was an atheist, whereas the United States claims to be a Christian country (for what *that’s* worth!)—with conservatives, in particular, claiming the title “Christian” for themselves.
- Her stated “philosophy” (if it can be dignified with that label—[ideology](#) would be a more apt one) emphasized the “fact” that governments are the evil above all evils—yet near the end of her life she hypocritically went on “welfare.”

- She allegedly believed in rationality, yet did not heed research that demonstrated that smoking leads to cancer—and died from lung cancer!

Although I share the concern of Hartmann and Sacks that our society is becoming ever more hierarchical (with its middle class continually shrinking), and agree that Randian ideology has been, and is, playing some (rather small?) role in causing that trend, I disagree with their use of the word “extinct.” Granted that they use that term with reference to the middle class. But “extinction” is *properly* used only with reference to *species*, not some given *segment* (e.g., the middle class) of a given species.

*That* fact does *not* mean, however, that “extinction” should not be on our minds today. For the fact of the matter is that [extinctions](#) are an extremely important phenomenon at present—with human activities being the primary cause: Population growth, with its attendant habitat destruction; pollution (including global warming—caused primarily by the burning of fossil fuel burning, and the elimination of carbon “sinks”); etc.

Hartmann and Sacks may be worried about the growing influence of Rand’s ideas, but that matter is “peanuts” in comparison with the threat posed by global warming—a topic dealt with intelligently by [Prof. Clive Hamilton](#), for example. The recent [climate change report](#) of the World Bank (done for them by the Potsdam Institute) states (p. xiii) “If they [“current mitigation commitments and pledges”] are not met, a warming of 4°C could occur as early as the 2060s.” Prof. Kevin Anderson (of Britain’s Tyndal Centre, and an advisor to the British government) would add that such an increase would be “[devastating](#)” for our species.

Unfortunately, such an increase is *likely*. Thus, not only is the *middle class* in danger of “extinction”—so is our *species*!

There is, however, “good news” here: Were members of the middle class to (a) wake up to the threat that we currently face from global warming, (b) realize that a “[tipping point](#)” relative to climate change has either been crossed, or soon will be, so that (c) our only choice now is that of adaptation, with (d) movement in a [communitarian](#) direction (as opposed to a “[prepperian](#)” one) being the “choice” mode of adaptation, such a movement (e) being undertaken by private individuals and organizations (given that only a fool would look to government for leadership—something regarding which Ayn Rand would perhaps agree!!), (f) those taking this option seriously would have the best chance to survive the ravages that global warming is likely to be inflicting on us humans (as if this hasn’t *already started*!).

Put another way, middle-class people have a great opportunity in front of them—being “saviors” of our species. They need only open their eyes—and begin to act!

Were they to do so, with a communitarian movement expanding, each “cell” in that movement initially trying to develop a way of life that is as “community-sufficient” as possible, one

implication of this movement would be that those *not* a part of it would gradually lose their economic support—making clear that the elite, rather than, being the society’s most *important* component, has actually been (as is implicit in [Thorstein Veblen’s “industrial”/“pecuniary”](#) distinction) a *parasitic group* living off the “host” middle class. (Yes, Ayn, that’s true!) The surviving members of the middle class will then have the “upper hand,” and can decide whether to help members of the elite survive, or let them “wither away” (to quote Chuck Marx: *Some* people say “[Karl Marx](#),” but *I* say *Chuck* Marx!).

### **Addendum**

After writing this essay I discovered “[Harvesting Justice](#): Transforming the Global Food Supply Chain-Food Sovereignty,” by Tory Field and Beverly Bell. Although the focus of their article is on a movement to break the monopoly of food producers, rather than the threat of global warming, as global warming becomes more noticeable as a problem, it may become ever more clear to its members that they have been simultaneously engaged in efforts of relevance for adapting to global warming.

The fact that this movement lacks a communitarian component tells me that its members are not explicitly concerned with the realization of “design specifications.” (In fact, the very concept is likely foreign to them, although if they were made aware of the concept, I suspect that most members of this movement would embrace it.) The movement does not conform with my notions of what a proper movement would look like (i.e., communitarian), but I still see the movement as of potential value—and one that could rather easily be converted into one having an adaptive (to global warming) orientation.

## **It's Not the Pipeline That's the Problem!**

Alton C. Thompson

Opponents of [the proposed] Keystone XL [pipeline], who are planning a mass demonstration at the White House [on February 17th](#), have . . . come to view the pipeline battle in epic terms. “Alberta’s tar sands are the continent’s biggest carbon bomb,” [Bill] McKibben [wrote](#) at TomDispatch. “If you could burn all the oil in those tar sands, you’d run the atmosphere’s concentration of carbon dioxide from its current 390 parts per million (enough to cause the climate havoc we’re currently seeing) to nearly 600 parts per million, which would mean if not hell, then at least a world with a similar temperature.” Halting Keystone would not by itself prevent those high concentrations, he argued, but would impede the production of tar sands, stop that “carbon bomb” from further heating the atmosphere, and create space for a transition to renewables. “Stopping Keystone will buy time,” he [says](#), “and hopefully that time will be used for the planet to come to its senses around climate change.”

So states Michael T. Klare, in his recent “[A Presidential Decision That Could Change the World: The Strategic Importance of Keystone XL](#).” This pipeline is being “pushed” by (among others) the Koch brothers (David and Charles)—a part of their motivation being, it seems, to “freeze out” Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez. As [Greg Palast has stated](#):

The Kochs need heavy crude. But the Brothers Koch have a problem. Heavy crude is controlled by a heavy dude—President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela.

In case you haven’t heard, the [US Department of Energy now says \[that\] Venezuela](#), not Saudi Arabia, has the world’s largest petroleum reserve—including the overwhelming majority of the planet’s heavy crude.

And Chavez is not giving it away. “We are no longer an oil colony, Mr. Palast,” Chavez told me in one of our meet-ups in Caracas.

But my interest here is not so much in the *interests* of those behind those who support creating this pipeline. It is, rather, in the planned protest at the White House on February 17 (when our son will be 40!). The fact that the *use* (i.e., the *burning*) of this oil, once refined, will mean *disaster* for our species—a point not made sufficiently clear in Klare’s article—is certainly a *reason* for having this mass demonstration. My question, however, is: ***Even if it is successful, what will it accomplish?***

That’s a *rhetorical* question, of course, because my answer is that it will accomplish little; it will prevent “dirty” oil to enter our country (thereby preventing spills from leaks, that might endanger aquifers), and will adversely affect the monetary interests of those who have invested in this

venture; but oil consumption will continue—and the threat posed by global warming will still exist, and become—in fact—ever more severe.

What's needed is recognition that a tremendous amount of *inertia* is present in our societal system (and others, of course), so that weaning our society away from oil usage would be a difficult process that would take many years. *During* that period of weaning the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, would *increase*, and for that—and [other reasons](#)—warming would not only continue, but continue at an *increasing rate*. This (very strong) possibility has at least two implication of extreme importance:

- There would be not only warming *per se*, but other phenomena associated with that warming—such as an increase in the number of storms, an increase in their severity, and increased variability in atmospheric conditions (rendering, thereby, the very concept of “climate” increasingly meaningless).
- As these various phenomena intensity, and do so at an increasing rate, food production will be increasingly affected, so that mass dying will occur, societies will begin to collapse, which phenomenon will further cause mass dying.

Demonstrations do nothing to change these facts. Indeed, to engage in demonstrations is to use valuable time for accomplishing *virtually nothing*, when that time could be used to engage in some important activity. I say “virtually nothing,” because only a fool would look to government for “salvation” from this problem.

What should be clear—but apparently isn't, even to Bill McKibben—is that it is now too late to halt further global warming: We have either crossed, or soon will, a “tipping point,” beyond which change will be inevitable, as negative feedback mechanisms give way to positive feedback ones, and “do their thing”—i.e., bring about rapid, and extreme, change.

Given this possibility, there is only one sensible option open to us at present—that of engaging in adaptive activities. As I have addressed that matter in many of my previous essays on this site, there is no need for me to expand on the matter in this essay.

## [Learning from \*Candide\*](#)

Alton C. Thompson

Candide [the “hero” of Voltaire’s *Candide*] eventually learns how to achieve happiness in the face of misadventure. He learns that in order to attain a state of contentment, one must be part of society where there is collective effort and work. Labor, Candide learns, eliminates the three curses of mankind: want, boredom, and vice. In order to create such a society, man must do the following: love his fellow man, be just, be vigilant, know how to make the best of a bad situation and keep from theorizing. Voltaire expresses this last requirement for such a society briefly when he says, “Let’s work without speculating; it’s the only way of rendering life bearable,” (Voltaire 77).

[The edition of *Candide* cited here was edited by Stanley Appelbaum. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1991.]

The above statement regarding Candide appears on [this site](#), and I must say that I am largely in agreement with [Voltaire](#)’s prescription for the Good Society, as offered in this short novel. What I would add, primarily, is that we humans acquired “design specifications” prior to the Agricultural Revolution, that that Revolution resulted in a Discrepancy developing—as ways of life began to change, with human biology remaining basically unchanged—the existence of this Discrepancy meaning that humans began, increasingly, to experience ways of life that were discrepant relative to their “design specifications”—were, that is, “unnatural.”

My current interest in *Candide*, however, is not so much in the fact that the main character’s (and also Voltaire’s?) conclusion relative to the nature of the Good Society matches my own to an important degree but, rather, to the fact that *Candide* is an excellent example of that *genre* of literature known as [satire](#):

**Satire** is a [genre](#) of [literature](#), and sometimes [graphic](#) and [performing arts](#), in which vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaming individuals, and society itself, into improvement. Although satire is usually meant to be funny, its greater purpose is often constructive [social criticism](#), using [wit](#) as a weapon.

The question that I have been asking myself lately is: How can the American people (but not *just* them, of course) be awakened to the fact that we are living in perilous times—times such that their grandchildren, and even children, may have lives that are shortened considerably by global warming? I have been writing with that objective in mind, but it occurs to me that the *genre* that I have been using—the essay—is not necessarily the most effective for the purpose of awakening my fellow citizens. Would *satire*, I am now asking myself, be a better vehicle to use

in attempting to awaken one's fellows to the dangers that lie ahead—and to then offer suggestions regarding how to respond to global warming?

In my younger days I enjoyed reading satire—such as [Jonathan Swift's \*A Modest Proposal\*](#) and Voltaire's writings—but have myself written virtually no satire—for the simple reason that I have no talent for writing it. And I wasn't aware that any satire has been written about our current environmental problem today.

A friend called me this morning, and mentioned that in a course for which he had signed up (but has since dropped) the instructor had made reference to "[Nacirema](#)." "Nacirema" is "America" spelled backwards, and was first used by anthropologist [Horace Miner](#) in a satire of American society ("[Body Ritual Among the Nacirema](#)"), published, in 1956, in the *American Anthropologist*.

Miner's article has inspired other similar articles, including "[The Mysterious Fall of the Nacirema](#)," by anthropologist Neil B. Thompson (1972). What makes this article of especial interest is its environmental orientation, Thompson stating, for example, that:

The task of completely altering the appearance of the environment to fit the Nacirema's ideology was given such high priority that the ssenisub [i.e., business] community completely controlled the amassing of resources, manpower, and intelligence for this purpose. This group, whose rank bordered on that of a nonregimented priestly caste, lived in areas that were often guarded by electronic systems. There is no evidence to suggest that any restraints—moral, sociological, or engineering—were placed on their self-determined enterprises.

Thompson emphasized the automobile's dominance in this strange culture, stating, for example:

Early research has disclosed the importance of ritualistic observance among the Nacirema. In support of these observations, we should note the presence of the quasi-religious Elibomotua [i.e., Automobile] Cult, which sought to create an intense sense of individual involvement in the community effort to completely control the environment. This pervasive cult was devoted to the creation of an artistic symbol for a man-made environmental system.

The high esteem of the cult is demonstrated by the fact that near every population center, when not disturbed by the accumulation of debris, archeologists have found large and orderly collections of the Elibomotua Cult symbol. The vast number of these collections has given us the opportunity to reconstruct with considerable confidence the principal ideas of the cult. The newest symbols seem to have nearly approached the ultimate of the Nacirema's cultural ideal. Their colors, material, and size suggest an enclosed mobile device that corresponds to no color or shape found in nature, although some authorities suggest that, at some early time in the development, the egg may have been the model. The device was provided with its own climate control system as well as a system that screened out many of the shorter rays of the light spectrum.



Not that this is bad literature, but my wish is that someone—here or elsewhere—would realize satire’s motivational potential and produce a lengthier satire—with high literary quality—that might wake people up to the insanity of our society, and the need for societal system change—in the direction of cooperative eco-communities that would strive for “community-sufficiency.

Doing so would do all of us a favor—and conceivably result in the “salvation” of many from the destruction that global warming will be inflicting on us. Not that all *can* be “saved;” but doing what one can *is* important. As the [Talmud says](#), “Whoever destroys a soul, it is considered as if he destroyed an entire world. And whoever saves a life, it is considered as if he saved an entire world.”

## **A Model American!**

Alton C. Thompson

Compare such consumption and priorities [that associated with the recent inauguration of Pres. O'Bomber] to another head of state, one [profiled](#) late last year in *The New York Times*: President José Mujica of Uruguay. Mujica, reports the *Times*, "lives in a run-down house on Montevideo's outskirts with no servants at all. His security detail: two plainclothes officers parked on a dirt road." He [hangs his laundry](#) on a clothesline outside his home.

As part of Mr. Mujica's effort, he says, to make his country's presidency "less venerated," he sold off a presidential residence in a resort city on Uruguay's Atlantic coast. He also refuses to live in Uruguay's presidential mansion, one with a staff of 42. Instead, he [has offered](#) the opulent abode as a shelter for homeless families during the coldest months.

The leftist president sees such practices as necessary for the proper functioning of a democracy, a goal which requires, reports the *Times* in paraphrasing him, that "elected leaders . . . be taken down a notch." He also explains his austere life style by drawing on the words of Seneca, the Roman court-philosopher Seneca: "It is not the man who has too little, but the man who craves more, who is poor."

This quotation, from geographer Joseph Nevins's "[Power, Privilege, and Climate Change](#)," makes the high-sounding words uttered by Pres. Barack O'Bomber—to say nothing about the pollution associated with the inauguration itself! (commented on in Nevins's article)—appear as hollow as they actually are. "Practice what you preach!" and "Lead by example!" are sayings that both offer valuable advice; they are sayings, however, that seem to be unknown to our president (or even the about-to-retire [Pope Benedict XVI](#), for that matter; also see [this](#)).

When I read Nevins's wonderful article on Uruguay's José Mujica, I thought to myself: If there is any executive who deserves to be "held up" as a model for the rest of us, it's him. I hope, therefore, that the way of life of Pres. Mujica gets widely publicized.

Here is Nevins again on this admirable man:

José Mujica's net worth when he took office in 2010 was \$1,800. While his official presidential salary is about \$108,000 per year, he donates 90 percent of it, mostly to a program for expanding housing for the poor. This leaves him with a monthly income comparable to a typical Uruguayan. As Mujica is quick [to say](#), "I do fine with that amount; I have to do fine because there are many Uruguayans who live with much less."

The empathy that this man demonstrates for his fellow Uruguayans “speaks volumes,” as they say. And although Mujica’s decision to “live simply” may reflect more his concern for his fellow Uruguayans than his “carbon footprint,” he is to be admired on both fronts: Both as a man who is obviously interested in the well-being of his fellows—in the short run—and for their survival—in the long run. Pres. O’Bomber, in contrast, seems to have *neither* interest—although his *words* claim otherwise.

Mujica gave “[a speech](#) to UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro” in June of 2012, and in it argued “that the assault on the environment was a symptom of a larger disease, he asserted that ‘the cause is the model of civilization that we have created. And the thing we have to re-examine is our way of life.’” I couldn’t have made this point any better! As I have argued in previous essays on this site, our way of life is what’s responsible for the “pickle” that we are in at present; so that, given that fact, the “obvious” *answer* is for us to change our way of life.

What I have emphasized, however, is that this “answer” is simultaneously just a *partial* answer. What I *mean* in saying that is that we have reached a point where we have either crossed, or soon will, the “tipping point” relative to uncontrollable change in atmospheric conditions—the point where the negative feedback mechanisms which have been “working” to “fight” change will be giving way to positive feedback such mechanisms—whose “task” is to *accelerate* change. When one reflects on our society’s dependence on oil (for heating/cooling buildings, powering transportation vehicles, etc.), one realizes that *changing* our way of life will not be accomplished easily—or soon. As a consequence, it is *inevitable* that the problem global warming will become increasingly worse—and at an increasing rate.

*That* fact—the likelihood of becoming increasingly worse—implies that living, for us humans, will become increasingly difficult in the years and decades ahead. So difficult, in fact, that global warming is likely to wipe out most of the world’s population within a matter of decades (as, e.g., Britain’s Prof. [Kevin Anderson](#) has been noting). This is a terrible prospect to recognize—especially, perhaps, for those of us who have grandchildren (I have four)—but the laws of physics cannot be violated, so far as I know.

Above, I referred to a change in our way of life as being the “obvious” solution to the global warming problem, but added that it was only a *partial* answer. What I *meant* in saying that is that we should recognize that if we are to have any hope of surviving the “holocaust” that lies in our future, we will need to develop a new way of life. Put another (and more accurate) way, those who *do* develop, for themselves, a new way of life will have a higher probability of surviving than those who don’t—and as I have argued in previous essays on this site, the communitarian option [1] would appear to be the best survival strategy (engaged in by individuals, acting as individuals and as members of small groups—with government playing no role).

The point that needs to be emphasized, however, is that *even those who pursue this option have no guarantee that they will survive*—which is why I qualify my solution by noting that it is a partial one only.

From what I’ve read about Uruguay’s President Mujica, he doesn’t seem to be fully aware of the tremendous threat posed by global warming—the likelihood that it will wipe out most of the world’s population within a matter of decades. Ironically, however, despite that (apparent) fact, he has developed for himself a way of life that increases his chances for survival. Which is great! Because he is exactly the sort of person who *should* survive the “trials and tribulations” that lie ahead!

### **Endnote**

1. A point that should be noted is the importance that cooperation, and cooperative movements (including communitarian ones), have played in American history. For an excellent discussion, see John Curl’s [\*For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America\*](#) (2009).

This morning (February 12, 2013) I happened on the first edition of this book as a .pdf file, and downloaded it to my flash drive—without, however, noting the web address. When I later tried to find the web site, I couldn’t.

If, however, any reader would like me to send you a copy of this great book, you need but ask, and I’ll email it to you.

## **What Are Brains For?!**

Alton C. Thompson

At times, when disaster strikes, we are caught “off guard,” and are forced to suffer the consequences. Having no inkling that disaster is impending, we do not *anticipate* it—and so do not *plan* our future events with disaster in mind. Being, then, *surprised* by the disaster that occurs, we may be unable to take a course of action that removes us from harm’s way—so that we either suffer serious injury, or are “done in” by the disaster. For example, we may be driving down a highway, and in going over a slight hill, do not notice a car coming from the other direction—that is in the wrong lane. The result: An accident in which fatalities are involved. Or, we may be in bed sleeping, when suddenly a tornado rips through the neighborhood, destroys our house in the process—and kills all of the occupants.

In the first case it is reasonable to assume that we could *not* have anticipated that a fatal front-end collision was in store for us as we were climbing a slight grade. We did know in advance, of course, that *any* time that we are out driving, we are in potential danger of being in an accident (I have been in two myself, so far—neither with injuries, however). However, *living itself* requires that we transport ourselves from place to place, and if one is a resident of the United States this typically means traveling by automobile. One knows in advance, then, in traveling by automobile, that there is a risk of being in an automobile accident (“crash,” I have found out from personal experience, is the preferred term today!). But one also knows that one often has *little choice* than to travel by automobile—also knowing, though, that the risk of being in a “crash” is rather slight.

In the case of being killed by a tornado while asleep, there is the possibility that these deaths could have avoided had those killed listened to the weather report on the radio or television before retiring for the night, to learn the forecast for the immediate future. Had they known that tornadoes were forecast for their area during the night, they could have prepared for this possibility by, e.g., traveling to a relative’s place (located out of the danger zone) for the night, sleeping in the basement that night, etc. But even if they *had* listened to the weather report for that night, they may not have learned of a tornado threat for their area—so that they may have had no reason to prepare for a tornado.

Does the threat of *global warming* resemble either of the above cases? What must be admitted, first, is that it *is* a different sort of threat:

- “Global warming” itself is not an event that happens in a split second (like the automobile “crash”), or even over a matter of a few minutes (the tornado damage); Rather, it is a *process* occurring over a period of decades—so that the *time scale* is of a

very different order.

- Given that it is a *process*, the *damage* associated with it occurs over a long period of time, with the amount of damage *increasing* over time. During a *given year*, however, there may be certain period of intense damage, with certain other periods experiencing little or no damage.
- “Global warming” itself is not a *single* phenomenon. The *term* “global warming” suggests, of course, that global warming involves only a *trend* in increase in the global mean temperature. However, *other* atmospheric phenomena are associated with this warming trend—such as increased *storminess*, an increase in the number of *severe* storms, and increased *variability* in weather conditions at any given location (some locations more than others, though)—so that the very concept of “climate” becomes, increasingly, a word without a real-world referent (like “unicorn,” for example!).

These differences from “ordinary” disasters are important, for from a *psychological* standpoint global warming is, therefore, much harder for most of us to recognize as a potential problem: It is not affecting us *now* (so far as we can tell), and we can’t imagine it affecting us *next* year, etc.; as a consequence, because we do not perceive it as an *immediate* threat, we see no *need* to engage in *preparatory* activities.

Of course, depending on the media that we use to obtain (allegedly) “factual” information and opinions, we may learn that global warming is a [hoax](#). Such claims may seem credible to us because of the advanced degrees said to be possessed by some of those making this claim. What we may fail to recognize, however, is that these “research findings” are being supported financially primarily by those with a financial interest in the *continued use* of fossil fuels. Even if we *learn* of this fact, we may find it hard to accept, because we may ask ourselves: “If this actually *were* a serious problem, surely those *producing* energy would suffer along with the rest of us if global warming; the fact that *they* don’t seem to be worrying about global warming surely means that global warming isn’t a problem.”

This is, of course, a very reasonable conclusion to make; what it fails to recognize, however, is that people—even educated and wealthy ones—are not always rational, and do not always act in a manner that is to their interests—or those of their children and grandchildren.

Nor does it recognize that being an executive in the energy industry does not make one an expert regarding whether or not global warming is occurring. There *are* many scientists who have been devoting much of their lives to researching global warming, and their consensus is that (a) global warming *is* occurring, and (b) occurring primarily because humans, through their burning of fossil fuels, have been adding carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) to the atmosphere, (c) thereby increasing the “greenhouse effect,” (d) thereby causing more of the heat energy re-radiating from earth to be

“trapped,” (e) thereby causing an increase in the global mean temperature (among other changes in atmospheric phenomena).

Granted that understanding, thoroughly, atmospheric phenomena over a surface as diverse as the earth’s is a difficult matter, because the interrelationships involved are complex, and our knowledge of those interrelationships is still not complete (and likely never will be!). It is, then, not *surprising* that disagreements arise among scientists—which disagreements are then exaggerated, and misinterpreted, by those who either *want* (for whatever reasons) to disbelieve in global warming, or who have a *vested interest* in denying global warming. But the vast majority of climate scientists, despite slight differences that may exist between them in various details, are in broad agreement that global warming is occurring, and is largely “[anthropogenic](#).”

Because of the experiences to which members of our species were subjected in the distant past, our species developed a brain with capabilities greater than with other species, and physical characteristics that allowed us to develop speech, to grasp and manipulate things with our hands, be highly mobile (because of an upright posture), etc. Our later development of *language* (*oral* initially, *writing* later) was an aid not only in *communication*, but in the developing of *thought* itself.

We learned to make inferences from observations, including *law-like* inferences; we learned to reason deductively; and we learned to conduct *controlled* experiments and from them derive empirical laws. These intellectual developments not only helped to *understand* the past and the present, but to make intelligent “guesses” as to what would occur in the future—intelligent, that is, relative to some of the guesses made by our ancestors, made on a much less substantial basis. Thus, we have this—the World Bank’s [recent report](#), done by the Potsdam Institute, which states (p. xiii) that:

Without further commitments and action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the world is likely to warm by more than 3° C above the preindustrial climate. Even with the current mitigation commitments and pledges fully implemented, there is roughly a 20 percent likelihood of exceeding 4° C by 2100. If they are not met, a warming of 4° C could occur as early as the 2060s.

Note here the this report does not *predict* that the global mean (which has increased by about 0.8° C. since 1750 CE—roughly, when the Industrial Revolution began) will increase by 4° C. by the 2060s; it states, rather, that *if* “current mitigation commitments and pledges” are not “fully implemented,” then it’s likely that the global mean will increase to 4° C. above the 1750 level (i.e., will increase about 3.2° C. between now and the 2060s) by the 2060s.

The scientists at the Potsdam Institute cannot be expected to know if the “mitigation commitments” referred to above will, or *will not*, be “fully implemented”—that’s not in their

realm of expertise. If, however, one recognizes (a) the *influence* which the energy firms play in our government—in *fighting* efforts to address the issue of global warming, and (b) also recognizes the *inertia* built into our economic system—i.e., the fact of our heavy dependence on petroleum products, and (c) the absence of any *substitute* for petroleum to which our economy could quickly switch, one will, *of necessity*, recognize that in the absence of some sort of miracle, by the 2060s the global mean will have increased by 4° C. (from what it was in 1750 CE).

What *adds* to the likelihood of this occurring is that it's likely that we have crossed, or soon will (because of the "inertia" factor), the "tipping point" relative to "climate change," meaning that processes have been set in motion that cannot be reversed—even with the implementation of geo-engineering measures. (Which measures are *not* likely to occur anyway; and if they *do* occur, could conceivably simply create *other* problems that cannot even be anticipated now.)

This would be a drastic change! So drastic that it's likely that most of the world's population will be wiped out.

We are faced today, then, with two options:

- *Ignore* the warnings that have been issued by climate scientists until one is clearly affected by global warming—at which time one "scrambles" to respond to the problem in some meaningful way.
- *Anticipate* the problem, recognizing that it will only be a *real* problem "down the road," but also recognizing that global warming will become more and more serious—at an increasing rate, in fact—with no possibility of halting its "progress." In recognizing this, also recognizing that one's only option—if one wishes to survive, and wishes the same for one's children and grandchildren—is to begin—ASAP—to engage in *adaptive* measures.

The first of the two options above involves putting one's "head in the sand," the second, using one's brain. Try to guess, then, which of these options I would advocate!

I have noted in previous essays that it would be foolish to look to government for providing leadership relative to adaptation, so that one would need to act either as an individual acting individually or as a member of a (small) group, with the following as being among the specific options:

- Become a homesteader.



- Join an existing eco-community, or join with others in establishing a small community—(a) located to be “safe” from the ravages of global warming, and (b) designed to be as “community-sufficient” as possible. (A third characteristic that I would add is: Create the community in such a way that the way of life it provides to its inhabitants is one that accords with their “design specifications” [1] as humans.)

I have, in previous essays, stated my preference for the latter option, noting, e.g., that a group will have more skills available at its disposal than a single individual or family, and adding that this option relates very well to our country’s past—as indicated by John Curl’s [recent book](#) (which I can supply to anyone who asks as a .pdf file).

## Endnote

1. The idea behind the concept of “design specifications” is that prior to the Agricultural Revolution of about 10,000 years ago a co-development occurred of humans as biological entities and their way of life (which was a gatherer-hunter one, with the *details* of ways of life varying geographically). That is, humans developed an “economy” that “fit” them as biological entities and, conversely, developed biologically in a way that fit their way of life.

With the Agricultural Revolution new ways of life began to develop, but human biology remained basically unchanged. Because of this, a Discrepancy was developing between the way of life for which humans had become “designed” and the way of life they actually *led* (were *forced* to lead, in many cases). Put another way, humans found themselves living an increasingly *unnatural* way of life—a fact that may account for virtually all of the problems that humans have faced since the Agricultural Revolution!

As to *what* are our “design specifications,” this is a matter discussed in various works (beginning, apparently, with Wisconsin-born Thorstein Veblen), but it is my conviction that the best way to come up with a list of such “specs” is for (in this case) the members of a prospective community to get together to discuss the matter, and then arrive at a list that is meaningful to *them*. For if it has meaning for *them*, they will have a genuine interest in designing their community so that the way of life it provides will accord with their particular list of “design specifications.”

An implication here, of course, is that one community’s list might differ rather substantially from that of another—which would seemingly make the very concept of “design specifications” problematic (in not being an “objective” concept). But does that possibility bother me? Not in the least!

## The Values March: Where to Next?

Alton C. Thompson

The world is a diverse place; and although the *trend* has been to move in the direction of greater homogeneity (in certain respects, at least), the world is *still* a rather diverse place.

“Diversity” can, of course, be measured in different “dimensions,” but the results of one study of diversity that I find of particular interest—and relevance—are depicted on the following figure:



This figure is derived directly from [this site](#), but ultimately from (Milwaukee-born) Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel's [\*Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence\*](#) (2005). I have, however, modified the figure in two ways: I have eliminated the vertical and horizontal scales that exist on the original, and have added a diagonal line that extends from the lower-left corner upward to the upper-right corner. My reason for adding this line will be explained later.

A few words on the methodology used by Inglehart and Welzel are in order before commenting on this study. The data for the study came from the [World Values Survey](#) and [European Values Study](#). Those research efforts had involved asking a series of questions of respondents, with the answers provided forming the basis for the Inglehart-Welzel study. Given the expectation, on the part of the latter researchers, that some variables would be closely correlated with other variables—so that, in effect, they measure the same phenomenon—Inglehart and Welzel subjected their data to [factor analysis](#) in an effort to “collapse” the variables into a smaller, but more meaningful, set of variables, the results of this analysis resulting in the identification of two “dimensions”:

- A dimension—“continuum” is perhaps a more apt term—with “survival values” at one end and “self-expression values” at the other end.
- A second dimension with “traditional values” at one end and “secular-rational values” at the other end.

(I should add that the scales that accompany the figure in the works that I have cited have a 0 in the center, with a value (factor score) of +2 near the *right* end of the scale, and a value of -2 near the *left* end of the scale. Replace “right” with “top” and “left” with “bottom” for the vertical dimension of the access, of course.)

Table 2.1 (p. 49) in their book notes (i.e., the factor analysis “discovered”) that *Traditional Values* emphasize the following beliefs:

- God is very important in my life.
- It is more important for a child to learn obedience and religious faith than independence and determination.
- Abortion is never justifiable.
- I have a strong sense of national pride.
- I favor more respect for authority.

Per that same table *Survival Values* emphasize the following:

- I give priority to economic and physical security over self-expression and quality of life.
- I am not very happy.
- I believe that homosexuality is never justified.
- I have not, and would not, sign a petition.
- I believe that one should be very careful about trusting other people.

The authors note in this table that Secular-Rational Values emphasize the *opposite* of Traditional Values, and that Self-Expression Values emphasize the opposite of Survival Values.

In commenting on this study—the figure in particular—let me begin by noting two tacit implications suggested by the figure that can potentially mislead the reader:

- The lower-left corner of the figure seemingly represents an “in the beginning” sort of situation—i.e., it seemingly refers to the earliest type of human society (i.e., gatherer-hunter society), suggesting that “primitive” equals “miserable,” perhaps even “unbearably miserable.” However, studies of “primitive” peoples have often concluded the *opposite*; for example, Marshall Sahlins’s [\*Stone Age Economics\*](#) (1972), whose first chapter is famously titled “The Original Affluent Society” (alluding, of course, to John Kenneth Galbraith’s 1958 [\*The Affluent Society\*](#)). (Also see [this](#) and [this](#), but also [this](#) for a different perspective on the matter.)
- The blackened circles on this figure represent individual countries, with the position of a given circle representing that country’s “location” on both the X axis and Y axis. The position of a given circle, in indicating that country’s degree of “Tradionalism” on the one hand, and “Survivalism” on the other hand, seemingly suggests that *everyone* in the given country is similar in their “values.” However, this is patently not true—and I assume that the authors are fully aware of this fact.

The question of homogeneity-heterogeneity *is*, however, an important one for their study, given the authors’ interest in not simply describing and understanding a *static* situation, but predicting change over time—a fact indicated by the very subtitle of their book—*The Human Development Sequence*. Implicit in the authors’ figure is *dynamism*, a *trend* in a given society’s development over time, tending to move along the line that I have added to their figure—moving “upward” from the lower-left corner toward the upper-right one. I do not dispute such a tendency, but would add that that “movement” *also* tends to involve *greater internal diversification* in certain important respects—so that it might be advisable to add a third dimension to the figure.

*How* might a society become more diversified internally? I would suggest the following as possibilities:

- Increased [sedentism](#), as gatherer-hunter and/or pastoral nomadic groups are either wiped out or forced to change their way of life.
- Change in the distribution of population—toward increased urbanization.
- Increased occupational diversity—as agriculture (the dominant part of the economy initially) gives way to manufacturing (and perhaps mining), which then gives way to tertiary and quaternary economic activities.
- Goods movement over longer distances (including imports into, and exports from, the country).
- Increased diversity in lifestyles—basically a function of the growing tendency toward a greater and greater degree of inequality (in incomes, power/influence, and prestige).
- Increased variation in motivations-beliefs-values, as a consequence of increased occupational diversity, etc.—one consequence being a tendency for a breakdown in feelings of solidarity.

This latter point was of particular interest to Wisconsin-born [Thorstein Veblen](#), who famously distinguished between “industrial” and “pecuniary” employments, and [stated](#), for example (p. 114):

The "industrial" activities, whose characteristic is workmanship, of course include the work of directing the processes of industry as well as of contriving, the aims and ideals of industry—such work as that of the artist, the inventor, the designer, the engineer and the foreman. This range of employments has to do with adapting the material means of life, and the processes of valuation constantly involved in the work run on the availability of goods and on the material serviceability of the contrivances, materials, persons, or mechanical expedients employed. They have to do with relations of physical cause and effect. In the received scheme of economic theory these employments fall under the head of "Production". The "pecuniary" employments fall under the head of "Distribution." They have to do with the distribution of wealth—not necessarily with the distribution of goods to consumers. The processes of valuation involved in this work run on the exchange values of goods and on the vendibility of the items with which they are concerned, and on the necessities, solvency, cupidity, or gullibility of the persons whose actions may affect the transaction contemplated. These valuations look to the pecuniary serviceability of the persons and expedients employed. The objective point of the former range of valuations is material use, of the latter pecuniary gain. Indirectly this latter class of employments may have a very considerable effect in shaping industrial life, as witness, e.g., the

industrial changes incident to the formation of trusts; and it is this indirect effect that has commonly received the attention of the economists.

He added (p.115):

[It should not be] necessary to point out that the pecuniary employments, with the aptitudes and inclinations that give success in them, are, in their immediate bearing, in no degree serviceable to the community, since their aim is a competitive one. Whereas the latter [i.e., “industrial” employments] commonly are serviceable in their immediate effects, except in so far as they are, commonly under the guidance of the pecuniary interest, led into work that is wasteful or disserviceable to the community.

That is, not only is a different *mentality* associated with those engaged in “industrial” vs. “pecuniary” occupations, but the latter tends to be *parasitical* (!) with reference to the former. Thus, [Karl Marx](#) had, in his famous [Das Kapital](#) (1867), explored the exploitation that occurs in capitalistic regimes (despite “official” claims to the contrary), and Veblen added his “two cents” worth to that discussion.

The “thrust” of Inglehart and Welzel’s book is that there is a certain virtually inevitable course of societal development—with the added implicit suggestion that this is a “good” direction. For how can one question Secular-Rational and Self-Expression Values? Perhaps more importantly, they seem to suggest that such values can be common in a society only if it is a “highly-developed” one.

You will note, on the figure, that Sweden is closest to the upper-right corner, with Norway and Denmark not far behind. Given my Norwegian-Swedish heritage—but being a third-generation USan (i.e., citizen of the United States)—I suppose that I should be somewhere between those three Scandinavian countries and the United States on the figure (note that the United States is fairly low on the Tradition Values scale, but comparable to the Scandinavian countries on the Self Expression Scale).

Had I been involved in the World Values Survey (used by Inglehart and Welzel), I’m not sure where I would “fall” on the graph, for my religious values are expressed well by this passage in Amos 5:21 - 24:

<sup>21</sup> “I hate, I despise your religious festivals;  
your assemblies are a stench to me.

<sup>22</sup> Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,  
I will have no regard for them.

<sup>23</sup> Away with the noise of your songs!  
I will not listen to the music of your harps.

<sup>24</sup> But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream!

(One can, with good reason, regard this as a Traditional view of religion, I suppose—given that this was written centuries ago; but in a very real sense it is highly *radical*, because it does not relate very directly with either Judaism or Christianity today!)

On the Survival Values-Self Expression Values scale, however, I’m sure that I would score to the far right—which I do not see as incompatible with my communitarian value orientation. But I *do* see this as ironic, given that I am by no means a “right-winger”!

The relevance of the above facts (about me) is that in most of the essays that I have written for this web site I have been (a) issuing warnings of the threat posed by global warming, have (b) asserted that it’s now too late to halt further global warming, (c) so that adaptation is our only option new, and that (d) given that it would be foolish to look to government for leadership on this matter, it is (e) necessary for individuals, acting either as individuals acting separately or as members of small groups, to begin to engage in adaptive efforts. I mentioned earlier that Inglehart and Welzel’s book seemingly suggests “that there is a . . . virtually inevitable course of societal development . . .,” so that in their thinking, societal collapse via global warming is apparently not something that is on the horizon—a position that I regard as highly naïve.[1]

I, in contrast, believe that the evidence that this will occur is substantial, and have been promoting the creation of small communities, located to be safe (insofar as that’s possible!) from the ravages of global warming, while also being as “community-sufficient” as possible—and designed to provide a way of life that accords well with our “design specifications” as humans (see Chapters 2 – 4 in my [eBook](#)). The question which the Inglehart-Welzel research suggests implicitly, I suppose, is: *Can such communities provide a decent way of life for their residents?*

What the Inglehart-Welzel analysis seems to suggest is that this question should be answered in the *negative*—and I would agree with that conclusion . . . to a point. The *reason* that I agree—but *only* to a point—is that the chaos that likely lies ahead for us humans, as a consequence of global warming’s become ever more severe as a problem, means that it will undoubtedly be *difficult* for those who survive the ravages of global warming to develop a “decent” way of life: The challenges that they face will be significant, perhaps even overwhelming. But we must not let the possibility of failure deter us from at least *trying* to survive.

Indeed, I prefer to look at the *challenge* put before us by global warming as an *opportunity*—an idea implicit in my “[But is Ruin a Bad Thing?](#)” [2] An opportunity to create a New Society—which, from a *human* standpoint, would be much better than what currently exists, a society that would, e.g., satisfy [Benjamin R. Barber](#).



To answer, now, the question posed by my title: Given that, within a few decades, global warming is likely to wipe out most of the world's population, I foresee a great deal of misery ahead for many—something that does not accord well with my values. If, however, a New Society movement gets underway—and despite the “trials and tribulations” likely to be faced by those who are a part of that movement—I foresee tremendous potential in the development, in the communities constituting that New Society, a *value system* that will be embraced by (virtually) all members of that New Society. Thus, *potentially* at least, there is potential for values to develop in an extremely positive direction.

## Endnote

1. They *do* state, however, that (p. 46): “Cultural modernization is not irreversible. It results from socioeconomic development and protracted economic collapse [as a result of global warming?] can reverse it, as was happening during the 1990s in most of the Soviet successor states.”
2. It seems like the reasons for wanting—hoping, praying for!—our society's imminent collapse are virtually endless. The [following](#) provides a list of some of those reasons:

Believe the War on Terror has been an unmitigated disaster? Find it difficult to wrap your head around the Long War's long list of horrors? Think the Obama administration and Congress's willingness to wage the War indefinitely is murderous myopia? Think again: the War on Terror is good at any number of things. It shifts yet more war-making power from the legislative to the executive branch. It bolsters the size and power of the US military. It creates the largest and most expensive intelligence complex in human history. It enriches government contractors, new firms and legacy suppliers alike. It justifies unprecedented assaults on civil liberties. It enrolls both major political parties and all prominent national politicians. It furthers the militarization of American society. Above all, it reproduces itself. The War on Terror spawns terror where it belongs: far from America's shores.

Here's [more](#):

If the murder of Oscar Grant on an Oakland transit platform marked the dawn of the Obama era, the cold-blooded murder of former Naval reservist and Los Angeles Police officer Christopher Dorner might just mark the end of whatever optimistic hope people can muster in his administration. Whether an innocent young man just trying to get home, shot in the back after being racially profiled and slurred, or a man driven to his breaking point after being fired from a similar police force that operates according to its own warped morality and overarching objectives, the state of the union is a powder keg whose wick has gotten shorter due to decades of looking the other way.

Just minutes before Barack Obama began his state of the union address, San Bernardino County Sheriffs, knowing full well what they were doing, burned Christopher Dorner to death. From police brutality and racism to political unaccountability, from lack of economic opportunities to the extrajudicial murder of anyone deemed an enemy of the state, Dorner's life and death offers us a much clearer picture of the state of this union than last night's speech or media commentary.

And [this commentary](#) on O'Bomber's recent State of the Union speech:

**What Obama Said (and What He Meant) About Climate Change, War and Civil Liberties**



by [Norman Solomon](#)

The words in President Obama's "State of the Union" speech were often lofty, spinning through the air with the greatest of ease and emitting dog whistles as they flew.

Let's decode the president's smooth oratory in the realms of climate change, war and civil liberties.

**"For the sake of our children and our future, we must do more to combat climate change."**

We've done so little to combat climate change -- we must do more.

**"I urge this Congress to get together, pursue a bipartisan, market-based solution to climate change..."**

Climate change is an issue that can be very good for Wall Street. Folks who got the hang of "derivatives" and "credit default swaps" can learn how to handle "cap and trade." The corporate environmental groups are on board, and maybe we can offer enough goodies to big corporations to make it worth their while to bring enough of Congress along.

**"The natural gas boom has led to cleaner power and greater energy independence. We need to encourage that."**

Dual memo. To T. Boone Pickens: "Love ya." To environmentalists who won't suck up to me: "Frack you." (And save your breath about methane.)

**"That's why my administration will keep cutting red tape and speeding up new oil and gas permits."**

Blow off steam with your demonstrations, you [350.org](#) types. I'll provide the platitudes. XL Keystone, here we come.

**"After a decade of grinding war, our brave men and women in uniform are coming home."**

How's that for an applause line? Don't pay too much attention to the fine print. I'm planning to have 32,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan a year from now, and they won't get out of there before the end of 2014. And did you notice the phrase "in uniform"? We've got plenty of out-of-uniform military contractors in Afghanistan now, and you can expect that to continue for a long time.

**"And by the end of next year, our war in Afghanistan will be over."**

If you believe that, you're the kind of sucker I appreciate -- unless you think "our war in Afghanistan" doesn't include killing people with drones and cruise missiles.

**“Beyond 2014, America’s commitment to a unified and sovereign Afghanistan will endure, but the nature of our commitment will change. We’re negotiating an agreement with the Afghan government that focuses on two missions: training and equipping Afghan forces so that the country does not again slip into chaos, and counterterrorism efforts that allow us to pursue the remnants of al Qaeda and their affiliates.”**

We’re so pleased to help Afghan people kill other Afghan people! Our government’s expertise in such matters includes superb reconnaissance and some thrilling weaponry, which we’ll keep providing to the Kabul regime. And don’t you love the word “counterterrorism”? It sounds so much better than: “using the latest high-tech weapons to go after people on our ‘kill lists’ and unfortunately take the lives of a lot of other people who happen to be around, including children, thus violating international law, traumatizing large portions of the population and inflicting horrors on people in ways we would never tolerate ourselves.”

**“We don’t need to send tens of thousands of our sons and daughters abroad, or occupy other nations. Instead, we’ll need to help countries like Yemen, Libya and Somalia provide for their own security, and help allies who take the fight to terrorists, as we have in Mali. And, where necessary, through a range of capabilities, we will continue to take direct action against those terrorists who pose the gravest threat to Americans.”**

We don’t need flag-draped coffins coming home. We’re so civilized that we’re the planetary leaders at killing people with remote control from halfway around the world.

**“We must enlist our values in the fight. That’s why my administration has worked tirelessly to forge a durable legal and policy framework to guide our counterterrorism efforts. Throughout, we have kept Congress fully informed of our efforts. And I recognize that, in our democracy, no one should just take my word for it that we’re doing things the right way. So, in the months ahead, I will continue to engage Congress to ensure not only that our targeting, detention and prosecution of terrorists remains consistent with our laws and system of checks and balances, but that our efforts are even more transparent to the American people and to the world.”**

I’m sick of taking flak just because I pick and choose which civil liberties I want to respect. If I need to give a bit more information to a few other pliant members of Congress, I will. The ones who get huffy about the Bill of Rights aren’t going to get the time of day from this White House. I recognize that some of my base is getting a bit upset about this civil-liberties thing, so I’ll ramp up the soothing words and make use of some prominent Democratic members of Congress who are of course afraid to polarize with me. Don’t underestimate this president; I know how to talk reverentially about our great nation’s “checks and balances” as I undermine them.

**“The leaders of Iran must recognize that now is the time for a diplomatic solution, because a coalition stands united in demanding that they meet their obligations. And we will do what is necessary to prevent them from getting a nuclear weapon.”**

Maybe it’s just about time for another encore of “preemptive war.”

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I believe this is enough for now!—but, sad to say, the list could go on and on and on and . . . .

## **NeWFism: Some Further Thoughts**

Alton C. Thompson

In proposing a new religion—[NeWFism](#)—in a previous essay, one of the points that I made regarding NeWFism was that “A [given] NeWF [New Word Fellowship] would have no Holy Book (e.g., the Bible). Sources of authority for participants would be science, the Holy Spirit (for those who believe that there is such a being)—gut feelings, etc.” In stating this, I did not intend to say that for a given *NeWF participant* there would be no “holy book”—there might, or might not, be, with some participants having one such book, other participants, some other book. My intention was to state that NeWFism *as a religion* would have no “official” Scripture. Even this statement is not quite true, however, because if a given NeWFian “congregation” chose for itself a “bible” of some sort, it would be free to do so; after all, my perception of NeWFism is that it would be comprised simply of a series of “congregations,” with no bureaucracy or hierarchy (very unlike, then, Roman Catholicism!) being able to wield authority over individual “congregations.”

Any reader of my essays over the past year will have noticed that many of them have made reference to the Christian Bible—which fact might be interpreted as contradictory to one of the fundamental tenets of NeWFism. But as I explain above, although *NeWFism itself* has no Scripture, it does not follow from that fact that individual NeWFians do not have one. Still, I have been trying to wean myself away from the Christian Bible, preferring—perhaps because I was raised in Christianity—to find a Biblical basis for doing so! That fact may be highly ironic—but it *is* a fact, nonetheless, and I offer no apologies for this “deficiency”!

In searching for such a basis *in the Bible itself* I have been able to identify two possible avenues so far. One is to interpret [John’s gospel’s](#) reference to a “[paraclete](#)”—interpreted as “counselor,” “helper,” etc. — (14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7) as giving one permission to use the “*paraclete*” as one’s authority rather than the Bible—to, in effect, *abandon* the Bible. ([Quakers](#)—i.e., members of the Society of Friends—seem to have reached this conclusion.) The basic argument in this case is that insofar as the Bible contains revealed truths, those truths were revealed to people who lived *centuries ago*; and that the need *today* is for *current* revelations, rather—such as those given by the *paraclete*—to those of us *living today*.

Although I find this argument persuasive, another argument has occurred to me recently—one having its basis in the Bible’s development, over time, as a book—i.e., what was composed, when, and by whom. Following is a [brief summary](#) of the “Old Testament’s” composition:

The first five books—[Genesis](#), [Exodus](#), [Leviticus](#), [book of Numbers](#) and [Deuteronomy](#)—comprise the [Torah](#), the story of Israel from the [Genesis creation narrative](#) to the death of [Moses](#). Few scholars today doubt that it reached its present form in the [Persian period \(538-332 BC\)](#), and that its authors were the elite of exilic returnees who controlled the [Temple at that time](#). The books of [Joshua](#), [Judges](#), [Samuel](#) and [Kings](#) follow, forming a history of Israel from the [Conquest of Canaan](#) to the [Siege of Jerusalem c.587 BC](#): there is a broad consensus among scholars that these originated as a single work (the so-called "[Deuteronomistic history](#)") during the [Babylonian exile](#) of the 6th century BC. The two [Books of Chronicles](#) cover much the same material as the Pentateuch and Deuteronomistic history and probably date from the 4th century BC. Chronicles links with the books of [Ezra and Nehemiah](#), which were probably finished during the 3rd century BC. Catholic and Orthodox Old Testaments contain two (Catholic Old Testament) to four (Orthodox) [Books of Maccabees](#), written in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC.

The history books make up around half the total content of the Old Testament. Of the remainder, the books of the various prophets—[Isaiah](#), [Jeremiah](#), [Ezekiel](#), [Daniel](#) and the twelve "[minor prophets](#)"—were written between the 8th and 6th centuries BC, with the exceptions of [Jonah](#) and [Daniel](#), which were written much later. The "wisdom" and other books—[Job](#), [Proverbs](#) and so on—date from between the 5th century BC and the 2nd or 1st BC, with the exception of some of the [Psalms](#).

What is to be noted in particular here is that the books of the *prophets* were written during and after the eighth century BCE, with some of them, then, being the oldest books in the Bible. The following has been stated regarding one of those prophets, [Amos](#):

The **Book of Amos** is a prophetic book of the [Hebrew Bible](#), one of the [Twelve Minor Prophets](#). [Amos](#), an older contemporary of [Hosea](#) and [Isaiah](#), was active c. 750 BC during the reign of [Jeroboam II](#), making the Book of Amos the first biblical prophetic book written. Amos lived in the kingdom of [Judah](#) but preached in the northern kingdom of [Israel](#). His major themes of [social justice](#), God's [omnipotence](#), and [divine judgment](#) became staples of prophecy.

(A separation of the northern and southern kingdoms had occurred in 922 BCE, with Samaria established as the capital of the former, and Jerusalem the capital of the latter.) Two theories as to the *recording* of Amos's message are "that 1) disciples of Amos followed him and recorded his message and 2) that someone in his audience in the North recorded his message."

The "heart" of Amos's message is contained in this passage from [Chapter 5](#) of his book:

"I hate, I despise your religious festivals;  
your assemblies are a stench to me.  
<sup>22</sup> Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them.  
Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,  
I will have no regard for them.  
<sup>23</sup> Away with the noise of your songs!  
I will not listen to the music of your harps.

<sup>24</sup> But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Amos is speaking here for God, of course, and in effect saying that there is but one way to worship God—to attend to the well-being of one’s fellows. The prophets that came after Amos delivered the same basic message—which raises the question: Were these “religious” people or what? It’s clear that they were not promoting anything that we would label “religion;” rather, they were promoting a certain *value*, and insisting that people attempt to live their lives in a manner consistent with that value. “God” entered their thinking not as a Deity to be *worshipped* but, rather, as—they claimed—the *Source* of the revelation that they believed they had received, which revelation they felt obligated to convey to their fellows. (Perhaps the *following* of this could be aptly given the label “worship,” if *any* activity warrants that label)

Given that the prophetic books (which do not so much *prophecy*, as *preach*!) are the earliest books in the Bible, one could very well argue that the Bible itself would never have come into existence had there not been prophets preaching, beginning in the eighth century BCE. [1] This (strong) possibility suggests that *the portion of the Bible that most warrants attention today* (in addition to the John passages referred to earlier) *is the prophetic portion*; and that although the *historical* details recorded in those books are of no interest for us moderns, the central *value* of those books—the well-being of others—is of *timeless* relevance.

When we think of “values” today, we may think, e.g., of the Survival—Self Expression and Traditional—Secular-Rational continua of [Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel](#). Or may think of the [“Terminal” and “Instrumental” values](#) associated with Milton Rokeach (the author of [The Nature of Human Values](#) (1973)). [2]

Terminal values	Instrumental values
■ A comfortable life	■ Ambitious
■ An exciting life	■ Broad-minded
■ A sense of accomplishment	■ Capable
■ A world at peace	■ Cheerful
■ Equality	■ Clean
■ Family security	■ Courageous
■ Freedom	■ Forgiving
■ Happiness	■ Helpful
■ Inner harmony	■ Honest
■ Mature love	■ Imaginative
■ National security	■ Independent
■ Pleasure	■ Intellectual
■ Salvation	■ Logical
■ Self-respect	■ Loving
■ Social recognition	■ Obedient
■ True friendship	■ Polite
■ Wisdom	■ Responsible
	■ Self-controlled

(For a brief discussion of those values, see [this](#). The source of the figure to the left is [this](#).)

In addition, there is this [list of 400 values](#), etc.

What is to be noted about values is that there are values, and then there are values! That is, one can have values with reference to any number of different things (using that word in a generic sense, to include, e.g., activities), so that the list of values identified as important by *one* person can differ considerably from the comparable list of

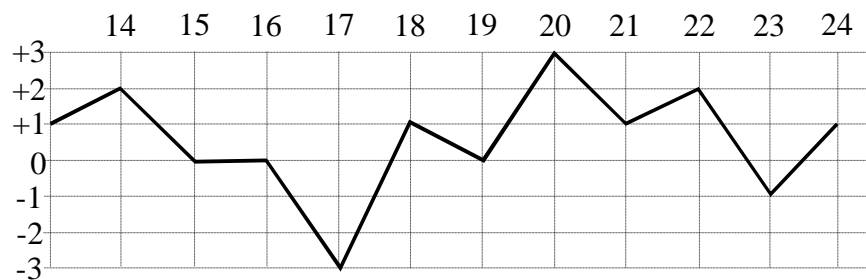
another person.

One would like to think that a scholar, in identifying a list of values, had some definite purpose in mind—such as explaining certain behaviors (thought to be worth studying!). But one can ask of any given study that makes use of “values”:

- How “values” is being defined.
- What specific values were identified for the study.
- How a given value was determined/measured.
- Why the values used in the study were identified

Insofar as “values” can be equated with “attitudes,” the values/attitudes that one has play some role in affecting one’s behavior. For example, if I were given a “values test” that asked me to react to a series of statements using a 7-point [Likert scale](#), with +3 meaning “strongly agree,” -3 meaning “strongly disagree,” and 0 meaning “indifferent,” and one of the statements on the test was “I like symphony concerts,” my answer would be +3. Does this mean that I frequently attend symphony concerts, however? In my case, no, because financial considerations act as a restrictive “force,” preventing me from attending as many symphony concerts as I would like to attend. I “get around” this, however, by listening to symphonic music—e.g., some Russian tone poems this morning, while driving to work—while in my automobile.

If one can imagine a “values test” with 50 items, using a 7-point Likert scale, and being administered to 100 people, one would be able to take the results and create, for each participant, a “profile” that might look like this (in part—just for statements 14 - 24):



For various reasons it might be of interest to compare one person’s profile with another’s (i.e., perform an “O-analysis), determining a “coefficient of similarity” (*not* one of

correlation) between each pair of individuals in the study. One might be interested in then identifying groups (based on similar attitudes), and then discover what else the members of a given group had in common besides attitudes—e.g., what they typically *do* (or would *like* to do).

One use for such profiles is that one would expect to find, for a group of friends, that they have similar attitudinal profiles. However, one thing that a given profile does *not* indicate is the

*strength* of one's attitude regarding a given statement. For example, my best friend lacks the interest in classical music that I have, but the interests that each of us places *considerable* value on coincide rather closely, so that we enjoy each other's company.

The point that I wish to make here, however, is that if we try to model our lives after the Hebrew prophets of old, how much we *like* another person—although affecting who we associate, and do not associate with—should not be what truly “drives” us. Our concern, rather, should be on empathizing with others, and becoming aware of their needs, and doing what we can to “minister” to those needs—being careful, however, to not violate the other's sense of self-respect.

This concern for others includes not only those we know, but those we learn about through the various media. In addition, of course, it includes the future—the likelihood that global warming will be wiping out most of the world's population within a few decades, so that unless we engage in adaptive activities, we are likely to perish—and even if we do engage in such activities, . . . . The sad thing is that so few people are concerned with their fellow humans, either in the immediate, or the “down the road,” future.

Not all others can—or should—be related to in the same manner; for example, those who are *abusive* to others need to be related to in a manner different than those who are *abused*. In general, however, we should attempt to relate to others in a loving way.

This is the message that the ancient Hebrew prophets have for us; and if we take this message away from the Bible, along with the *paraclete* message in John's gospel, we have taken virtually all that the Bible has to offer! Everything else is basically diversionary!

NeWFians with a Christian background, in deriving this simple message from the Bible, can then feel that they have no further need of the Bible. But if some still do, that's not a problem, for what's needed for a NeWF to “work” is agreement, on the part of the participants, to follow the rules specified for NeWFs. Those coming to a NeWF from other backgrounds may have *their own* need to go through the sort of process that I have done (regarding the Bible), using whatever Scripture—if any—is a part of *their* background. I envy anyone who doesn't feel a need to go through such a process!

## Endnotes

1. Before starting to write this essay this morning (February 18, 2013), I sent an email to Robert B. Coote (author, with Mary P. Coote), of [\*Power, Politics, and the Making of the Bible\*](#), 1990), and a few hours later received this response:

Thanks very much for your good message.



A very interesting idea. I suppose many factors were necessary for the existence of the OT, certainly including the prophets behind the biblical books of the Prophets. The OT as we know it would certainly be unthinkable without them. Whether one could distinguish a single most important factor might be doubtful.

Nevertheless on the role of the Prophets I would simply recommend a good up-to-date critical introduction, such as by John Collins (Fortress) or Michael Coogan (Oxford), to get the sweep. For a much older overview, you might have a look at the book that Mary P. Coote and I wrote, *Power, Politics, and the Making of the Bible*. It does not represent the thesis you describe, but it might suggest something along those lines.

I hope this helps,

Bob Coote

2. It has [been said](#) of this book: “The findings reported here suggest that the concept of values, more than any other, is the core concept across all the social sciences. It is the main dependent variable in the study of culture, society, and personality, and the main independent variable in the study of social attitudes and behavior.”

## Why the Bible Shouldn't Exist

Alton C. Thompson

Living involves engaging in *behaviors*, and as one moves up the evolutionary ladder, behaviors become less and less a function of biological “programming,” and more and more one of *learning*. This statement needs to be immediately qualified, however:

- *What* one learns is not necessarily *accurate* (insofar as there is such a thing as “objective truth”).
- Behavior is not *just* a function of programming and learning—so that for us moderns income, e.g., is a factor that both enables and prevents certain behaviors to/from occur(ring).
- The *experiences* associated with living are a source of learning, in that *from* one’s experiences one learns to *avoid* certain behaviors while being *attracted* to other behaviors.

The latter sort of learning usually occurs on an unconscious level; but, again, as one moves up the evolutionary ladder, *unconscious* learning tends to lose importance relative to *conscious* learning—which fact illustrates the point that learning itself tends to *evolve*. I am not a biologist, but it appears to me that the following learning sequence tends to occur in nature:

- Unconscious learning from one’s experiences.
- Learning by observing the behavior of others—of one’s own and other species.
- Learning by observing behavior *taught* to one via *demonstrated* behavior (the “teaching” here involving at least some level of consciousness).
- Learning from *signals* being sent to one by members of one’s own group/species.
- Learning from *signs* associated with a language—delivered orally initially, via the “written” word at a later point. (The reason that I put “written” in quotation marks is that “writing” may have begun by making marks on rocks, or chiseling them into rocks, followed by pressing marks into clay, then writing as we know it today—with some sort of ink—on skin, then papyrus, then paper. Now, of course, much writing—such as what I’m doing at the moment—is done by hitting the keys on a keyboard, which then appear on a screen, and are then saved to a drive.)

Until recently—and for centuries—learning was attained not only via direct observation, but by listening to others speak (informally in conversations, formally in lectures), and by reading—books initially, and newspapers and magazines later. Today, of course, much of one’s reading is done by viewing a computer screen.

In the case of newspapers, once one has read the paper one usually throws it away (“recycles” it, if one is “ecologically conscious”)—after, perhaps, clipping an article or two, a recipe, an obituary, etc. Magazines, too, are usually discarded after reading—although if one subscribes to the *National Geographic*, e.g., one may keep issues one has read for many years. Books, however, are more typically shelved after reading (or returned to the library), for what one learns from non-fiction books (which is not to say that one cannot also learn from fiction, however!) tends to be something other than yesterday’s news—tends, rather, to be historical facts, principles/laws, instructions, etc. Tends, that is, to be *knowledge* rather than mere “news,” so that although one has *learned* from what one has read, one is unable to *remember* all that one has learned—so that one wishes to keep at least some of the books that one has read “handy,” because one may feel a need to refer, in the *future*, to some of the books that one has read.

Some books in one’s possession may be consulted on a regular basis—such as a dictionary, or an encyclopedia, although today it is more common to consult an online source of information than an encyclopedia. (I have a set of encyclopedias, but I haven’t consulted any of those books for years—so that I could just as well discard the set, and thereby make room for books that I *am* more likely to consult with some regularity.)

A question that arises relative to this with the (Christian) *Bible* is: Is this the sort of book that warrants *regular consultation* (e.g., daily Bible reading) or, rather, is it a book to read—or at least skim—only from time to time? Note that my question here assumes, tacitly, that the Bible *should* be thought of as having a *message*—so that it is a book that is very different from, e.g., a *dictionary*.

To assert that the Bible has a *message* is surely an uncontroversial statement, for if it *didn’t* contain some sort of message, how could it be regarded as *Scripture* by a religion—Christianity, in this case? But let me next ask a potentially embarrassing question: If we are to *learn* something from our reading the Bible (or hearing it read aloud), what will be the *nature* of that learning? Some of the learning that we do, during our lives, helps us *understand* more completely or clearly, whereas other of our learning helps us decide *what* we should do and/or *how* to do it.

Which of these best describes the learning that *should* result from reading the Bible, or hearing it read? In both cases *remembering* is associated with one’s learning—for learning that is not remembered has little or no value. But in the case of the Bible does one *learn*, and then

*remember* what one has learned, to have the *understanding* gained from one's reading constantly at "one's fingertips" or, rather, does one learn, and then remember what one has learned, so that one will always be prepared to *act* on the basis of what one has learned? To use the word "should" (as I did above) is, of course, to enter the realm of *values*—a realm wherein there are no objective "truths." But to discuss the Bible *without* making any reference to values is utterly to miss the point of that book.

I suppose that the best answer to the above questions—relating to understanding and acting—is that *both* reading for understanding and for direction in how one should live/act are important in Bible reading. A question that arises here, however, is: Does the *Bible itself* provide us with a more definitive answer as to how the Bible should be "used"?

In the case of Christianity the central personage is supposedly Jesus, with the four canonical gospels that begin the Christian "New Testament"—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—providing us with information regarding what Jesus supposedly and taught—and otherwise said. Granted that the *accuracy* of the contents of those four books is in question, and has been for a long period of time, but if we ignore that fact—which is the tendency for those who regard it as Scripture—it seems clear that Jesus's teaching had its basis in (what Christians refer to as) the "Old Testament," [Leviticus](#) 19:18 for example:

<sup>18</sup>You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

That is, what's notable about Jesus's teaching is his emphasis on the *behavioral rule* "love your neighbor as yourself," illustrated well in the famous "sheep" and "goats" passage of [Matthew 25:31 – 45](#) and the Good Samaritan parable of [Luke 10:25 – 37](#).

Jesus's later follower, [Paul](#) of Tarsus, recognized, however, that following that rule is not necessarily easy, but added that if one "walks by the Spirit," one *will* be able to follow that rule without difficulty. The author of John's gospel seemingly gave the name "[paraclete](#)" to the Spirit that Paul referred to (14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7), and argued in [14:16-17](#):

<sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—<sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

The "I" here is Jesus, and in effect he is saying here "I will be gone soon, and after that occurs you should keep in mind that the teaching that I have been doing has been 'targeted' at those who would listen to me speak; it was delivered *orally*, and was therefore intended just for those who *heard* my words. However, although I will no longer be your teacher, it does not follow

from that fact that you will no longer have a teacher; you will be sent a teacher who, unlike me, is *immortal*—a teacher that you will always have with you, the *paraclete*.”

Note here that we have no indication that Jesus was literate, so that he did not write anything—because he *could* not write anything. Note also that the above statement attributed to Jesus implies that because his teaching was *directed* (orally) just to his contemporaries—i.e., those who were close enough to him physically to be *able* to hear him, and who also *chose* to hear him—that it was *intended* only for them. **Jesus did not intend for his teachings to be written down, and would not even have approved their being written down!** This is, granted, a rather “radical” conclusion to make, but it is one that follows logically from the passage in John’s gospel quoted above—which suggests that one should attend to *current* revelation to *oneself*, not to *past* revelations to *others*.

It’s ironic that no *authorization* for writing down what Jesus said and did can be attributed to what *Jesus* is said to have taught—yet this occurred anyway, and no one seems to have recognized this irony. What Jesus clearly states in the above passage is that after he is gone, since his words have only been of an *oral* nature, and therefore disappeared into “thin air” immediately upon their utterance, what people would need in the *future* was not a *written* text—something that he did not foresee developing, and would not have approved *had* he foreseen this happening—but a *paraclete* (or Spirit, to use Paul’s language) that would *always* be available to provide those interested with guidance (and even “Spirit-filling”?).

Ironically, then, Jesus’s words themselves provide no basis for converting them into Scripture; if anything, his words do exactly the opposite! Which may suggest an additional question to some (in addition to the matter of how to “access” this *paraclete*—a topic that will be addressed shortly): Does the “Old Testament” provide us with a *similar* basis for not treating it as Scripture?

Put another way: Just as the New Testament provides us with reasons for arguing that *the New Testament should never have been created*—for its creation would have been offensive to Jesus!—can we make a similar statement regarding the Old Testament?

I, for one, would give a positive answer to this question. Briefly, here is the argument that I would use in support of that answer. In doing so I will take the following statement in [Amos](#) (5:21 – 24) as being representative of the prophets’ perspective:

<sup>21</sup> “I hate, I despise your religious festivals;  
your assemblies are a stench to me.

<sup>22</sup> Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,  
I will not accept them.

Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,  
I will have no regard for them.

<sup>23</sup> Away with the noise of your songs!

I will not listen to the music of your harps.  
<sup>24</sup> But let justice roll on like a river,  
righteousness like a never-failing stream!

The “message” here is that—with God speaking through Amos:

- Activities that you refer to as “religious” activities—such as festivals, assemblies, offerings, songs, harp music—are an abomination to me!
- If “religious” activities are to be defined as activities that are *pleasing* to me (i.e., God), they must be—and *only* be—those activities whose intent is to address suffering by those among you humans who are suffering.
- If writing this down will help you remember this, go ahead and do so. But never forget that simply *remembering* this is not enough; you must *act* on it, using whatever abilities you have, and whatever information you have about suffering “out there”—and must teach your children to follow your example.
- You may find it helpful to meet with others to get specific ideas regarding what to do—as individuals, and as members of a group—and to develop plans—again, either individual or group plans. But, again, keep in mind that any meetings you have with others must have *such* activities as their focus—rather than “mere” socialization, etc.

Note that in this case I have had God permit writing—but only for the purpose of stating some rather *abstract principles*. Those principles may be timeless, but their *specific interpretation* will vary with the (a) *particular talents* of those determined to implement them, (b) *where* they live, (c) *when* they are living, etc. Thus, although written directives—stated in abstract terms—will be of value to you, writing that *diverts attention* from those abstract commands is an abomination—as much so as *activities* that serve to divert attention from those commands.

It follows from the above that the Old Testament also gives us a basis for asserting that it should never have been created! Indeed, had the various prophets not arisen and “done their thing,” it’s likely that the Old Testament *would* never have been created! The prophetic books do not appear at the beginning of the Old Testament, true; but that fact does not reflect *when* they were composed/edited—for the fact of the matter is that without the activity of the prophets, it’s highly unlikely that there would be such a thing now as the Old Testament.

I noted earlier that the *New* Testament contains four important contributions:

- One should love the neighbor—a command borrowed from the Old Testament.
- Following that command is difficult, given that (what we today would call) our

“socialized nature” tends to drive us in a different direction.

- With the Spirit’s help (Paul noted) one *can* follow that command (reasonably well, at least).
- Jesus promised that upon his departure a *paraclete* (what Paul referred to as a *Spirit*) would be sent which would (a) always be present, to (b) act as a counselor, etc. (and perhaps even “indwell” in people).

And just as the New Testament provides no basis for its own existence (the contrary, if anything!), the same is true of the Old Testament. Why, then, does Christianity have a fixation on these two collections of books?

The short answer is that although, in creating Christianity, the *intention* may not have been to divert attention *away* from the question of whether or not there was a sound basis for the existence of either the New or Old Testament, in the *development* of Christianity such a question became taboo. In being taboo one was discouraged from asking *why* either “testament” was created (from a scientific—rather than “intentionalistic”—standpoint) and whether it was even *appropriate* to do so. Therefore, such a question tended not to get asked.

Note that in asserting that the Bible should not have been created I am *not* saying that the gospel of Matthew, for example, should not have been written. What I am saying, rather, is that what the “thrust” of Jesus’s “ministry” suggests is that he would have objected to the creation of a *Scripture* with, e.g., Matthew’s gospel as one of its components. [Thomas Jefferson](#) seems to have implicitly recognized this point in creating the famous “[Jefferson Bible](#).” Jesus himself may not have taken such a stance relative to the *Scripture existing in his day* (which he could not himself read, so that his knowledge of it came from hearing it read and/or referred to), but whether he did or not is beside the point. For it seems clear that just as the prophets who had preceded him would have objected to making their pronouncements a part of Scripture, so would Jesus have had such an attitude toward his own pronouncements.

Why not? Because a book, or collection of books, given the status of “Scripture” tends, thereby, to be perceived as “untouchable,” with much of the *contents* of the Scripture also tending to divert one’s attention from the central message of the prophet (or Jesus) in question.

Neither the Bible as a *book*, nor the sorts of *meetings* established by Christians, have served—not just *well*, but at *all*!—the goals established by either the prophets or Jesus. If anything, they have done the opposite—and have therefore been an abomination! By being opposite they have, of course, helped their congregants be a *part* of “the world,” rather than *separated* from it. As is stated in [I John](#) 2:15 – 17, for example:

<sup>15</sup>Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. <sup>16</sup>For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. <sup>17</sup>The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

Given the “disappointment” that is Christianity, there is, then, the question: Assuming that meetings have *potential* for contributing to realization of the four points identified above (love of neighbor, etc.), how should they be designed to *realize* that potential?

The [Quakers](#) have apparently been serious about these questions (virtually alone among all of the Christian denominations), and have concluded that by meeting with like-minded others and remaining silent—waiting for the Spirit to speak to one or more present, with those receiving messages then expected to convey the message received to the others present—they will be able to be true followers of the prophets and Jesus. Another approach—a “talking” one, using the New Word Fellowship (NeWF) as the vehicle for doing so—has been suggested by James B. Gray in his [“Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning.”](#)

Perhaps it is time for those interested in taking the above four points seriously to begin discussing among themselves (a) the *purposes* that meetings should have, and (b) *how* meetings should, therefore, be designed to *achieve* those purposes—using Quaker meetings and the NeWF proposal (for that’s all it is at present, so far as I know) as the starting point for discussions.

Living inevitably involves learning, and that learning may result in changing the direction of one’s life. If ever there was a time when such a change was needed—on a large scale—because of the threat to our very existence posed by global warming, this is that time. Conceivably, developments such as those proposed above could play an extremely important role in changing the direction of enough person’s lives to prevent our extinction as a species.



## Theater of the Absurd?

Alton C. Thompson

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Year Book 2013, released Monday, led U.N. leaders to touch on the event.

"What we are seeing is that the melting of ice is prompting a rush for exactly the fossil fuel resources that fueled the melt in the first place," said Achim Steiner, U.N. under-secretary-general and UNEP executive director.

Are you looking for definitive proof that humans—their leaders in particular—lack a brain? The [above quotation](#) provides you with that proof—you need look no further.

In its *theatrical* form, [theater of the absurd](#) dates back to the 1950s, and to European playwrights. But the *fiction* of the 1950s has become the *reality* of our decade; the *theater stage* of the 1950s has become the *real world*.

Is there a word *other* than “absurd” to refer to the actions of those who are (a) *welcoming* the effects of global warming because (b) one of them is to enable the extraction—and then use—of that which (i.e., fossil fuels), when burned, will (c) increase the “greenhouse effect” in the atmosphere, thereby (d) contributing to *further* global warming? Perhaps there *is* something more absurd; but *if* there is, it is not on *my* “mental map”!

Evidently those who welcome global warming for this reason are able to recognize just *one* effect of global warming—that of making access to fossil fuels and other “resources” easier. This suggests not only that their education in the sciences has left them woefully ignorant, but that they don’t even read the newspapers. Granted that the mass media are not the ideal source for learning about global warming. But anyone who reads newspapers on a regular basis—and doesn’t restrict one’s attention to the comics—has surely read *something* about global warming there, and has learned that the *negative* benefits of global warming far outweigh the *positive* ones.

It’s true of [Svante Arrhenius](#) [1859 – 1927] that:

Arrhenius developed a theory to explain the [ice ages](#), and in 1896 he was the first scientist to attempt to calculate how changes in the levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere could alter

the surface temperature through the [greenhouse effect](#). He was influenced by the work of others, including [Joseph Fourier](#) and [John Tyndall](#).

and:

Based on information from his colleague [Arvid Högbom](#) ([sv](#)), Arrhenius was the first person to predict that emissions of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels and other combustion processes were large enough to cause global warming.

and, more importantly:

Arrhenius clearly believed that a warmer world would be a positive change. His ideas remained in circulation, but until about 1960 most scientists doubted that global warming would occur (believing the oceans would absorb CO<sub>2</sub> faster than humanity emitted the gas).

That is, Svante Arrhenius—the first person to predict that the burning of fossil fuels would cause global warming—believed that global warming would be a “good thing.” What those who *now* welcome global warming don’t seem to understand, however, is that the science of “climate change” has progressed a great deal since Arrhenius’s time. So that, for example, the [World Bank](#)’s [recent report](#) (done by Germany’s Potsdam Institute) states, for example (p. xiii):

Even with the current mitigation commitments and pledges fully implemented, there is roughly a 20 percent likelihood of exceeding 4°C by 2100. If they are not met, a warming of 4°C could occur as early as the 2060s.

Given the political realities today, the likelihood that “current mitigation commitments and pledges” will be “fully implemented” is, of course, on the order of **zero**! Meaning, then, that we can expect the global mean—which increased by about “only” 0.8° C. from 1750 to the present (i.e., a period of about 260 years) to increase by an **additional 3.2° C. within the next 50 years**.

Should the “welcomers” referred to earlier welcome such change? If they do, they are utter fools—yet, were they to know this, they likely would be “tickled pink”! Why is it that the only consequence that they think of when they think of global warming is increased access to fossil fuels?

That’s a rhetorical question, of course, because the likelihood of their *fully understanding* the implications of global warming is the same as the likelihood that the global mean temperature will increase by an additional 3.2° C. within the next 50 years—**ZERO**!

Those of us who know better also know that it’s unlikely that governmental agencies will *prevent* this extraction from occurring—so that we are left with the question: What should *we* do? What course of action would be a rational one for *us* to take—given the insanity with which we are faced?

Given the inevitability of a drastic increase in the global mean temperature—and the other atmospheric changes that will inevitably accompany that increase (increase in the number of storms, an increase in their severity, and an increase in variability, hence in unpredictability)—I see no rational course of action other than that of trying to *adapt* to the changes that will be occurring. I realize that some believe that engaging in protest marches in an effort to persuade our leaders to “get a handle” on this problem are worth engaging in; but given that it’s likely that we have already crossed (or soon will cross) the “[tipping point](#)” relative to “climate change,” I am unable to see the point of such efforts.

I have argued in previous essays on this site that:

- Although adaptation is our only realistic option now (given that geo-engineering efforts may not work, if tried may create new problems—but are unlikely to occur anyway!), those who take that option are not guaranteed survival—for they may have (a) chosen the wrong *location* to proceed with their efforts and/or may have (b) not engaged in the *appropriate* adaptive efforts *at* the location chosen.
- Adaptation that involves *in situ* adjustments at one’s current location is not likely to be sufficient to enable survival. Instead, successful adaptation will usually require that one move to a rural location and either (a) homestead or (b) establish, with others, a small community that tries to be as self-sufficient as possible (especially in food production). Another possibility, of course, is to move to an existing [eco-community](#) that has been designed with the threat of global warming in mind.

What’s needed, however, is for someone with leadership talent and/or abundant resources to start an adaptation movement—for the earlier one is initiated, the greater the probability that more will be saved from the ravages that global warming will be inflicting upon us. It’s entirely conceivable, of course, that global warming will render our species extinct—but we must act as if that is not a possibility. For if we simply *resign* ourselves to defeat, that’s surely what we will experience!

## The Virtues of Variety

Alton C. Thompson

The *function*—if not *purpose*—of sexual reproduction is to give a species variety in its members. From an *evolutionary* standpoint this is advantageous, for as, e.g., environmental changes occur, some members of the species may very well be “pre-adapted” to those changes—so that as *those* individuals survive and reproduce, the *species* is enabled to continue. The fact that the survivors are “deviants” relative to the norm means, of course, that the *species itself* will change somewhat—perhaps even significantly—in its characteristics. But the survivors, in producing progeny, will produce *variety*, so that *variety itself* remains a constant over time.

Our species basically stopped evolving about 10,000 years ago (when the Agricultural Revolution got underway), so that as ways of life began to change while our biology basically did not, the resulting “discrepancy”—between the way of life for which we had become “designed” (i.e., a gatherer-hunter one) and the way of life that we *actually had*—became an important causal factor. It caused misery on the one hand (as the exploitation of some by others began), but was also the basis for the origin of the major religions, critiques of society, utopian thinking, etc.

Regarding the major religions, for example, it seems clear that the ancient Hebrew prophets began their preaching in response to this discrepancy that was developing—although this fact could not have been known—to them or anyone—until *evolutionary thinking* came into being centuries later (although Charles Darwin’s contribution to this concept was entirely of a *negative* nature, ironically!).

The rise of hierarchical societies on the one hand meant that some were exploiting others, but on the other hand meant that variety—now with a *sociological* basis—was being maintained, and even intensified. Those individuals *suffering* from this new situation did not welcome it, of course—and their dissatisfaction occasionally resulted in revolts. We have, however, reached a point in world history when the “tables may turned.” When, that is, the miserable and oppressed may become the vanguard in creating a New Society—one that provides a way of life more in accord with human “design specifications.” For *everyone*, not just a few.

They *may* be, but there is no *guarantee* that they *will* be. It all depends on the response that occurs to **global warming**—*if*, that is, there *is* any significant response.

If one relies on the mass media for one’s information, one likely does not know that:

- Global warming *is* occurring. The global mean has increased by 0.8° C. already (since 1750—when the Industrial Revolution began), and is likely to increase by an additional 3.2° C. within 50 years. Think about that for a moment! A *drastic* increase in the global mean temperature is likely to occur within the lifetime of many of us.

- The fact that a “tipping point” has either been passed, or soon will be, means that it is now too late to halt the further “progress” of global warming.
- As the various phenomena associated with global warming—an increased number of storms, an increase in their severity, and increased variability (hence unpredictability) in atmospheric conditions, besides warming itself—increase, the earth will be rendered increasingly uninhabitable for many species.
- This will mean drastically reduced population sizes for many species (including our own), and extinction for some.
- Humans are the one species that can *anticipate* the changes that lie ahead, and can *plan* a response to them.
- The only *rational* response that we have at present is that of *trying* to adapt to the changes that will be occurring (by becoming involved in a New Society movement, I would add).
- Although *doing* so will not guarantee one’s survival, *not* doing so will certainly *decrease* the probability of one’s survival.

My reason for saying that the “tables could be turned” is that although the dominant values in our society are the “holy trinity” of greed, materialism, and selfishness, not everyone in our society is “possessed” by those values—as John Curl’s [\*For All The People\*](#) (2012) demonstrates—for the past as well as the present. Given that those *having* our society’s values are the most likely to be the “successful” members of our society, it follows that those in “lower” classes are most likely to:

- Have a value system of a more “underground” type—i.e., more in accord with our “design specifications” as humans.
- Be more likely to be drawn into a New Society movement than those who are “successful.”

What is needed, then, is a movement that has as its objective:

- Developing a new way of life—one designed to survive the ravages of global warming, while simultaneously enabling those engaged in that way of life to live in a manner that accords well with their “design specifications” as humans.
- “Targets” those most likely to be drawn into such a movement—such people happening to be those who currently occupy “lower” positions within the society.

If this occurs (let us *hope* that it does!), there *are* likely to be (human) survivors—with the survivors having a value system that differs substantially from the one that is currently dominant. But the diversity that *sexual reproduction* “produces” will continue. The *sort* of diversity that will then exist, however, is one having its basis in abilities, skills, and interests, rather than values.

## **Saving Pandas, But Not People?**

Alton C. Thompson

Pandas are [currently being](#) “threatened by habitat fragmentation and unsustainable development.” A [more complete explanation](#), however, is: “There are many reasons for the dramatic decrease in the wild population of pandas. These reasons are complex and include factors such as poaching, habitat destruction and degradation, the panda's low reproductive rate and bamboo flowering, followed by death of the plant.”

That is, the continued existence of pandas is in doubt in part because of the characteristics of the panda itself:

- It has a low reproductive rate.
- It has a very specialized diet—bamboo [stalks](#): “A giant panda's diet is 99% bamboo, 13 kg (30 lb) or more a day—that is an estimated 3,500 bamboo stalks a day!”
- It “bites the hand that feeds it”—i.e., through its eating it tends to kill the plant itself.

The other factor, however, is human activity:

- Poaching.
- Human activities that fragment and degrade/destroy its habitat.

Given, however, that the panda *cannot help* the facts that it has an extremely specialized diet and a low reproductive rate, the blame for the panda’s current plight must be placed squarely with *human activity*.

Currently, there are [fewer than 1,600 pandas](#) living in the wild (in the mountains of western China), and it is not surprising that the [World Wildlife Fund](#) uses a “picture” of a panda as a symbol for their organization, and is engaging in efforts to protect this animal (along with many [other species](#), of course). Some may be surprised to learn, however, that the question of whether efforts to save the panda should be continued is a [controversial](#) one:

The truth is, pandas are extraordinarily expensive to keep going. We spend millions and millions of pounds on pretty much this one species, and a few others, when we know that the best thing

we could do would be to look after the world's [biodiversity](#) hotspots with greater care. Without habitat, you've got nothing. So maybe if we took all the cash we spend on pandas and just bought rainforest with it, we might be doing a better job.

What I find ironic here—both in the efforts of the World Wildlife Fund and the suggestion of “buying rainforest”—is that the people on both sides of this “war” seem oblivious to the fact that *their own* species is currently being threatened. Perhaps not from extinction, but from severe decimation—the culprit being global warming.

The global mean temperature has increased by “only” [about 0.8° C.](#) since humans started transferring carbon from below the earth’s surface into the atmosphere, but is likely to increase by a total of 4° C. by the 2060s (see [this](#), p. xiii). The consequences of such an increase are likely to be “[devastating](#),” as Britain’s Prof. Kevin Anderson has asserted. For although an increase of an additional 3.2° C. between now and the 2060s is *itself* likely to be a problem, so are the *atmospheric changes* that are likely to accompany that increase: An increase in the *number* of storms, an increase in their *severity*, and increasingly erratic atmospheric conditions at any given location (with variation in that with location, however).

These atmospheric changes are likely to have a profound impact on food production—resulting in a scarcity of food, with food prices initially increasing, and with food eventually becoming basically unobtainable. As a result, death rates are likely to increase substantially as a result of starvation, disease, and violence—*perhaps to the point that most of the world’s population is wiped out.*

Although it’s *conceivable* that efforts will be made to reduce our emissions of “[greenhouse gases](#),” the socio-political situation is such that it’s *unlikely* that any serious efforts will be made. And if, rather, geo-engineering efforts are engaged in (which is slightly more likely), it’s entirely conceivable that this will involve “opening a can of worms”—i.e., causing unanticipated problems that will be even worse than those attributable to global warming.

If the “picture” that I have painted above of the human future is a *dismal* one, it is also a *realistic* one. We humans have physical and mental capabilities that are far superior to those of the panda, but so far we have used those abilities to put our species (and numerous other ones) in a perilous position. *That* fact makes one wonder if there is any hope that we will make an “about face,” and start approaching this problem in a rational manner.

My answer to the above “question” is that some will, and some won’t—with those in the latter category having but a low probability of survival, and even those in the former category having a probability of surviving that is only slightly higher.



What will those in the former category do to increase their probability of surviving? They will recognize that what is propelling us toward disaster is our *way of life*, so that—obviously!—the “way out” is to develop for oneself (perhaps in conjunction with like-minded others) a way of life that is designed with global warming in mind. That is, one will recognize that *in situ* adjustments would likely be fruitless, so that (a) movement to a “safe” location is called for; and that (b) the way of life one develops at that location must be one that is as self-sufficient (or “community-sufficient,” if that’s the avenue pursued) as possible—in the production of food especially.

The situation today is such that those able to think rationally will realize that their priority should be saving themselves rather than other species—such as the panda. It is terribly unfortunate that we are faced with that situation, but “that’s the way it is.”

Had we paid heed to the writings of, e.g., the late [Barry Commoner](#) several decades ago, and acted on the principles that he enunciated in 1971:

1. *Everything Is Connected to Everything Else*. There is one ecosphere for all living organisms and what affects one, affects all.
2. *Everything Must Go Somewhere*. There is no "waste" in nature and there is no "away" to which things can be thrown.
3. *Nature Knows Best*. Humankind has fashioned technology to improve upon nature, but such change in a natural system is, says Commoner, "likely to be detrimental to that system."
4. *There Is No Such Thing as a Free Lunch*. Exploitation of nature will inevitably involve the conversion of resources from useful to useless forms.

the situation might be very different today. But we haven’t, and the prospects are not good that our leaders will do anything significant to prevent catastrophe. As a consequence, if we are to survive, the probability of our surviving is increased by “taking matters into our own hands” and engaging in adaptive efforts. Even then, however, the probability of one’s surviving is not very good.

## **The Problems With Scripture**

Alton C. Thompson

In my [“Why the Bible Shouldn’t Exist”](#) I stated, for example: “Note that in asserting that the Bible should not have been created I am not saying that the gospel of Matthew, for example, should not have been written. What I am saying, rather, is that what the “thrust” of Jesus’s “ministry” suggests is that he would have objected to the creation of a Scripture with, e.g., Matthew’s gospel as one of its components.” In the current essay I focus specifically on the various problems that I perceive with *having* a Scripture (e.g., the Christian Bible in the case of Christians).

A useful “take-off” point here is to imagine that [Voltaire](#)’s [Huron](#) were to visit the United States now, and were asked to comment on the role that the (Christian) Bible plays in American life; he would likely respond: “It seems primarily to provide the basis for *employment* of a rather large number of people—members of the clergy, the bureaucrats associated with the various ‘religious’ denominations, Biblical scholars, and those who teach using the Bible as their primary text.” That is, rather than being a book that provides *behavioral guidance* to Americans—for the greed, materialism, and selfishness that he observed didn’t seem to have a Biblical basis—its primary function seemed to be of an *occupational* nature.

In noting the discrepancy between the behavior that he *observed* and the behavioral injunctions that he *read*, he might quite reasonably conclude that the *function* of these various employees—given their orientation to the Bible—must be to *divert the attention* of those hearing sermons and/or reading about the Bible from the Bible’s *teachings* regarding what one should, and should not, do.

Having reached this conclusion—and finding it difficult to believe (of course!)—he likely would ask himself why this was so. Were there, for example, *societal dynamics* at work that made this virtually inevitable?: Given that societies are *systems*, so that their various parts work together for the good of the system, the dominant sector in particular, and given that the Economy is obviously the dominant sector of the society, it follows, does it not, that the “religious” sector must serve the interests of the Economy? In addition, did not those societal dynamics virtually *require* that the Bible be given the status of *Scripture*—so that it would *thereby* serve the society’s needs reasonably well?

In examining the Economy, our Huron would notice that it was characterized by vast disparities in household income. He would likely attribute this to the society’s dominant value system—its emphasis on greed, materialism, and selfishness—but might also ask: Does the fact that the

Bible has been given the status of Scripture *contribute* to this societal situation? In thinking about this question, our Huron is likely to note that in the society's Christian churches—its Quaker ones being about the only exception—there was a clear distinction between *clergy* and *laity*; there were, that is, two classes of Christians—those who were “experts” on the Bible, and therefore had a duty to *inform* others as to its contents, and those who were *ignorant* about the Bible, and therefore needed to be *educated* as to its contents, by the “experts.” Thus, Christianity has created a class system within itself, and this class system acts somewhat as a “model” for the general society's class system; at the very least, it helps *support* the society's class system.

These “experts” claimed that everything stated in the Bible was “true,” and that apparent contradictions could be explained away. They also suggested—implicitly, if not explicitly—that lay people should *learn* what was in the Bible—not because they would be quizzed on its contents, but “just because.” (!) Lay people were even encouraged to *memorize* as many verses in the Bible as they could—because, one never knows when quoting Scripture to someone else can be useful; if nothing else, it will give one a sense of *superiority* over those less able to quote Scripture.

In being taught that everything in the Bible is “true,” one may not notice that the Bible contains many *genres* from a literary standpoint. The reason one may not notice this is that *clergy* insists that the Bible is *not* to be perceived as a collection of “mere” *literary* works, for doing so would be demeaning to the Bible.

In being taught that the Bible is “true,” one learns that this does not apply to [parables](#) attributed to, e.g., Jesus or the songs in [Psalms](#), but *does* apply to the various *narratives*—e.g., the claim that the ancient Hebrews had spent time in Egypt. [De nial](#) (please forgive the pun!) of this latter claim—or other ones—is met with censure; and, our Huron notes, is a cause of hatred and conflict between people. *That* fact puzzles our Huron, for he can plainly see that the Bible *teaches* love, but that the insistence on “inerrancy” causes some “Christians” to hate other “Christians.” He even learns that in the past, when there was but one “official” brand of Christianity, those not accepting the “official line”—i.e., “[heretics](#)”—were often severely punished (to the point of death) for this crime. Indeed, [William Tyndale](#) [1492 – 1536] was strangled to death for the terrible crime of translating the Bible into English! Our Huron perceived such a stance toward the Bible as an insult to one's intelligence—and concluded that perhaps the Economy required its inmates to be stupid, so that that was why this stance toward the Bible prevailed. Noticing that the inmates of the country were constantly being bombarded with “commercials” helped him convince him on this point.

Our Huron learned, curiously, that what a given Bible character is quoted as saying was addressed not only to his/her contemporaries, but to *everyone everywhere*. But that *despite* this fact, what was expected of one was not so much to *follow* any behavioral directives given in the

Bible, but to simply *learn* them—because having that knowledge might come in “handy” at some point in one’s life.

One thing that puzzled our Huron is that although he could see value in some of the parables (such as the Good Samaritan parable), he could also see possible value in some of the *narratives* in the Bible—if, that is, they were perceived as “mere” stories rather than historical accounts. That is, he could see that some of the stories (to say nothing of many narratives/stories found *elsewhere* than in the Bible) could be related to one’s life—with certain stories being meaningful to *some* individuals, other stories being meaningful to *other* individuals. However, the fact that one was forbidden from so perceiving any narratives made one reluctant to make such a parallel—and thereby add meaning not only to the Bible story, but to one’s own life.

Our Huron, in talking with different people in the society, found that most—even if churchgoers—had little or no interest in the Bible, but that *some* did, their purpose being to add meaning to their lives (see this [earlier essay](#) of mine). Our Huron found this somewhat odd, because *his own* reading in the Bible led him to believe that although it contained a great deal of (what my old Geology professor—a Methodist!--called) “guff,” it did offer *some* good “pointers” regarding how one should behave—what one should, and should not, do. Why, then, do some turn to the Bible in an effort to find something there that will help them *cope* with their everyday lives? Did I miss something as I was reading in the Bible? Granted that what we learn from the Bible—and perhaps especially from the “Old Testament” prophets—is that our concern should be for the *here-and-now* rather than the past. But in having such a concern, should not one’s concern be, primarily, with “doing for others” rather than simply coping. Indeed, he wondered, is there not [evidence](#) to the effect that if one has an other-orientation, not only will the *other* benefit, but *one’s self* as well?

The final thing that puzzled our Huron is that in his contact with educated Americans he learned that global warming was becoming a problem, and likely to become an extremely serious problem within a matter of decades. Given that the Bible taught that God had created humans and all other species, why, our Huron asked, are American “Christians”—*Americans in general*, in fact—so obtuse as to not realize that their *way of life* was responsible for this threat, so that if they had any regard for *God*, they would be working at *changing* their way of life—drastically? Could it be, he wondered, that their fixation on the Bible as *Scripture* was contributing to their blindness?

Fortunately, before departing our shores the Huron was made aware of [NeWFism](#)—a religion “lacking” a Scripture—and concluded that had this religion been introduced a century ago or so, and had “taken off,” that the United States—the *world*, in fact—would be a much better place than it is. However, he resigned himself to the strong possibility that most of the world’s population would be wiped out within a few decades, and departed for home.

## **NeWFism's Obstacles**

Alton C. Thompson

In an earlier essay I introduced a new religion, [NeWFism](#), named for its central institution, the New Word Fellowship (see [this](#), pp. 38 – 60). To the best of my knowledge no NeWF has yet been created (*I* have not done so); and just as there are reasons why *I* have not yet created a NeWF (which I will not get into here), so are there reasons why this religion has not “taken off”—either here in the United States or elsewhere. As my familiarity is only with the United States, I will confine my remarks below only to why NeWFism has not yet developed in this country.

For the most part, the varieties of Christianity present in the United States support the Existing Order. This is not, I would assume, *intentional* but, rather, has occurred because the needs of the Existing Order are difficult to resist, and “pull” individuals and institutions in a direction that is compatible with the Existing Order. As the dominant values of the Existing Order are the “holy trinity” of greed, materialism, and selfishness, even though the churches ostensibly *teach* a contrary value system, the [way they do](#) so virtually guarantees that their message will go unheeded. Even Quakerism has not been able to escape the tentacles of the Existing Order in this regard.

NeWFism goes *against the grain* of this society’s dominant value system, and for that reason can be expected to have a “tough row to hoe” so far as establishing a toehold in American society is concerned.

Those who might be *attracted* to NeWFism (and are *aware* of it—a very small number, likely!) will necessarily be a part of the Existing Order, and must be able to *survive* within that Order. The fact that they are *attracted* to NeWFism means that they have a “deviant” value system; and *that* fact likely means that they will not be able to “achieve” any degree of “success” within the Existing Order: Their deviant value system virtually guarantees this.

In fact, that lack of “success” means that their income may be at or near the poverty level—a fact that they find frustrating not only because they may be unable to live at anything but a rather low level of comfort, but because it prevents them from living in accord with their value system (one that emphasizes *doing for others*) to the degree that they would like. Not only do they tend to lack the *financial resources* that would enable them to “do” for others, but they also lack the necessary *time*.

Beyond these problems, if they are aware of the threat that global warming poses to us humans, they are also likely to be aware of the fact that our only viable option today—in responding to that problem—is to engage in *adaptive* activities, such as joining with others to create a small community designed to be as “community-sufficient” as possible (especially regarding food production), while also providing for its residents a way of life that accords well with their “design specifications” as humans (see Chapters 2 – 4 in my [eBook](#)).

If they are aware of the NeWF and also the global warming threat, they may very well recognize that the NeWF could be a useful tool for responding to global warming, via the communitarian option. They might be aware of the fact that communalism efforts have failed in the past, but recognize that *despite* that fact [communalism](#) (p. 283) is “so deeply embedded in American history and mythology that it will almost surely attract and inspire future generations curious to experiment in better ways of living.” Knowing this may give them some confidence in their commitment to that avenue.

On the other hand, however, they may realize that they are faced with at least three obstacles:

- Identifying others living nearby who share their value system, and beliefs that (a) global warming is occurring, (b) is posing a serious threat to us humans, (c) cannot be halted, with (d) a communalism movement being the most *rational* answer (insofar as there *is* one!) to this challenge.
- Identify nearby others who not only have the *above* qualifications, but possess *skills* that would be necessary for *creating*, and then *living in*, a small community.
- Obtaining the *funding* necessary for the purchase of the necessary land, paying for the necessary materials, and financing the necessary labor.

Given all of the obstacles that would face those who would like to become NeWFians, and use that institution for the planning, and then “operation,” of a small community, what these people must realize is that the “salvation” of our species may lie with them. For this reason, *they must not give up hope*, and must be ever alert as to *how* can make their dreams come true—i.e., *what* they can do to have their dreams realized.

## Seriously Funny

Alton C. Thompson

The Sirian smiled at this declaration [1], and did not look upon the author as the least sagacious of the company: and as for the dwarf of Saturn, he would have embraced this adherent of [\[John\] Locke](#), had it not been for the extreme disproportion in their respective sizes. But unluckily there was another animalcule in a square cap, who, taking the word from all his philosophical brethren, affirmed that he knew the whole secret, which was contained in the abridgment of [St. Thomas \[Aquinas\]](#). He surveyed the two celestial strangers from top to toe, and maintained to their faces that their persons, their fashions, their suns and their stars, were created solely for the use of man. At this wild assertion our two travelers were seized with a fit of that uncontrollable laughter, which (according to Homer) is the portion of the immortal gods: their bellies quivered, their shoulders rose and fell, and, during these convulsions, the vessel [ship] fell from the Sirian's nail into the Saturnian's pocket, where these worthy people searched for it a long time with great diligence.

--From Chapter 6 of [Micromegas](#)

The “uncontrollable laughter” of the traveler from [Sirius](#) (i.e., the “Sirian”) and his companion, the “dwarf of [Saturn](#),”[2] was on my mind when I read this headline: “[Yoga Will Turn Kids Into Godless Sun-Worshipping Pagans, Lawsuit Charges](#).”

The incredible stupidity of those who are bringing this lawsuit caused me to laugh—if not “uncontrollably,” then almost so. What makes the lawsuit particularly funny—in a pathetic sort of way—is that “lawyers for the National Center for Law and Policy (‘Faith, Family, Freedom’) [argue](#) that yoga is ‘inherently and pervasively religious’—this, from a [group](#) that has historically [fought](#) for prayer in school and on-campus Bible studies.”

Granted that this program is being funded “by a grant from a nonprofit group that promotes the Hindu-based Ashtanga yoga. . . .” But the program is (a) optional, and (b) “removes all religious aspects, replacing[, for example,] traditional Sanscrit words for poses with ‘airplane’ and ‘pancake’.” Those undertaking the lawsuit, in contrast, have a record of promoting prayer—*Christian* prayers, I assume—in school, as well as *Christian* Bible study.

We have here, then, a case of outrageous *hypocrisy* that also features abysmal *ignorance*. Not a laughing matter—although my initial reaction in reading the heading was to *laugh*, and not merely *smile*. For on the one hand this is but one indication of how much of an abomination so much of Christianity has become, and is also an indication of the low level of thinking that is gaining an increasingly tight grip on our society.



Anti-intellectualism has, of course, long been with us—as Richard Hofstadter argued in his [\*Anti-Intellectualism in American Life\*](#) (1962:[3])

In this [book](#), “Hofstadter set out to trace the [social movements](#) that altered the role of [intellect](#) in [American society](#). In so doing, he explored questions regarding the purpose of education and whether the [democratization](#) of education altered that purpose and reshaped its form. In considering the historic tension between access to education and excellence in education, Hofstadter argued that both [anti-intellectualism](#) and [utilitarianism](#) were consequences, in part, of the democratization of knowledge. Moreover, he saw these themes as historically embedded in [America's](#) national fabric, an outcome of its [colonial European](#) and [evangelical Protestant heritage](#). Anti-intellectualism and utilitarianism were functions of American [cultural heritage](#), not necessarily of [democracy](#).”

I myself see the existence of anti-intellectualism in this society, however, as the product of two conflicting facts ( or *forces*, if you will): The *ideal* that we learn, virtually by osmosis, in growing up in this country that all are equal in this country, all are free to pursue their dreams, equal opportunity exists, etc., and the *reality* that this is a very *unequal* society, with very *unequal* opportunities, and becoming ever more so.

Now if one knows, or at least *senses*, that “dream and reality” (to allude to [Nikolai Berdyaev's](#) autobiography) do not match, one's mind is placed in a state of turbulence, and one will unconsciously search for a “way out.” What may be “found” in this search is an *alternate reality* that becomes very real to oneself, and which one then attempts to *impose* on others. This is done *not*, notice, because a solid basis exists for that alternate reality, but because one has a *psychological need* to gain some sense of self-respect. Had this dream-reality conflict not existed, no such search would have occurred; and had the society been rather egalitarian—have characteristics that match the dream reasonably well—that conflict would never have arisen.

Just as with the discovery that fossil fuels could provide us with good sources of energy led to their increased use, so that our society is now *dependent* on those energy sources, and the “greenhouse” gases that we thereby put into the atmosphere have the *unintended* consequence of putting many species (including ours) in danger, so the development of an inegalitarian society is having unintended consequences. One of those consequences is to provide a situation in which anti-intellectualism is fostered, including the creation of a “denial industry” that is hard at work (receiving its financial support from energy interests, of course) trying (with some degree of success) to convince the public that global warming is *not* occurring.

It's a paradox that our species has a highly developed intellect, one that helps us *engage* in certain activities, but that intellect doesn't seem able to help us perceive the long-term *consequences* of those activities! A strange sort of intellect!

Thus, we create a dangerous situation for ourselves (and the members of other species) by learning to use fossil fuels, then make it difficult for ourselves to extricate ourselves from that



difficult situation by (a) becoming *dependent* on fossil fuels and (b) creating a society that fosters the development of a sort of thinking that encourages anti-intellectualism—i.e., the sort of thinking that emphasizes *denial*, and therefore simply *adds* to the difficulty of extricating ourselves from our current perilous situation. As Shakespeare’s *Puck* said: “Lord, what fools these mortals be!”

Is there *any* reason to have hope for our future?! (A rhetorical question, perhaps?)

## Endnotes

1. The “declaration” in question was stated in the previous paragraph: “A little partisan of Locke who chanced to be present, being asked his opinion on the same subject, said: “I do not know by what power I think; but well I know that I should never have thought without the assistance of my senses. That there are immaterial and intelligent substances I do not at all doubt; but that it is impossible for God to communicate the faculty of thinking to matter, I doubt very much. I revere the eternal power, to which it would ill become me to prescribe bounds. I affirm nothing, and am contented to believe that many more things are possible than are usually thought so.”
2. An odd combination—one traveler from a star, the other one from a planet!
3. More recent books on the subject include Susan Jacoby’s [\*The Age of American Unreason\*](#) (2008) and Charles P. Pierce’s . [\*Idiot America: How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free\*](#) (2009).

## Parable-Like Language

Alton C. Thompson

In at least one previous essay (which I cannot identify at the moment) I have argued that Jesus not only taught “love the neighbor” *explicitly*, but also *implicitly*—by, e.g., telling the Good Samaritan parable. I added, however, that there is more to a parable than the message itself. In addition, because a parable requires *interpretation*—some parables more than others, of course—it motivates one to *interact* with others, to “bounce” one’s ideas regarding its meaning off others to see if they agree or disagree. Given that everyone is likely to interpret any given parable differently—from slightly to greatly—one may find one’s own interpretation confirmed or, on the contrary, may find it very different. In the latter case one may disagree with the other’s interpretation, or may find it interesting—so interesting and convincing that it causes one to change one’s mind.

Especially if one finds the other’s interpretation (a) compatible with one’s own or (b) interesting/challenging, the interaction that one has with others as a consequence of the parable, may very well lead one to *respect* the other, and over time *like* the other, and even *love* the other. This may, in fact, have been the *intent* of the parable-teller! That is, the parable-teller may have realized that it is *not enough* to deliver a message to the *intellect*; simply *telling, or suggesting* to others (via parables), that they should love others will not necessarily *result* in their doing so.

However, insofar as parable-telling has the *direct* result of causing listeners (or readers) to interact with others in an effort to “compare notes”—to *either confirm* one’s own interpretation, or want to find alternative interpretations that will help *deepen* one’s own interpretation—that interaction may result in feelings of *respect*, then *liking*, then *love* toward some of those with whom one interacts. Whether this happens or not will depend on how “open” are the minds of those with whom one chooses to interact. (By the way, I see the same thing occurring in NeWF sessions, *regardless* of what is being discussed.)

Today (March 3, 2013), while in the adult class at my church, the first part of [Psalm 63](#) was one of the Bible passages discussed, and in reading verse 7

New International Version (NIV)

<sup>7</sup> Because you are my help,  
I sing in the shadow of your wings.

what struck me was the “shadow of your wings” phrase. It “dawned” on me that figures of speech such as that one are common in the Bible (the “Old Testament” in particular), and that

figures of speech are *very like parables*: They *demand* interpretation, and encourage the same sort of interaction with others that parables do.[1] Thus, regardless of *how* one might interpret a given figure of speech, if one feels compelled to discuss it with others, that interaction can lead, eventually, to feelings of love toward those with whom one interacts. (For one thing, one comes to understand that they are human just like oneself; and the interaction helps one realize that if others have flaws, so does oneself! This realization—which may suddenly “dawn” on one, either during a session or at another time—will help one be more tolerant of the other, and may very well lead to liking, and even loving the other.)

The churches have been “missing the boat” on this matter for centuries; even the Quakers don’t seem to have understood this point. The beauty of [NeWFism](#) is that it is oriented to discussion, unlike the typical church “service” (including Quaker meetings), and that interaction can cause the members to love one another; that need not be their *intention* in having meetings, but it is a likely *result*. In fact, it’s a result that is perhaps *most* likely to occur if it is purely unintended!

A point that I should emphasize here, in fact, that it is *precisely because* the NeWF features *controlled* discussion—i.e., discussion governed by a specific set of rules—that makes the interaction that takes place during a NeWF session to lead to respect rather than animosity, and liking-loving following the development of feelings of respect. This may not occur “overnight,” but is bound to occur eventually, I’m convinced.

If NeWFians are to have a Bible, what I suggest is that passages with figures of speech and parables be “lifted” from the Bible and other sources and put into a book. That would be a good project for somebody!

Another point that occurred to me today is that a few of my essays have made reference to Socrates (e.g., “[Socrates, We Need You!](#)”), and that Socrates compliments Jesus well. We can think of *spirituality* being associated with Jesus, and *rationality* being associated with Socrates. It seems to me that we are living in a time when both are needed, and that NeWF participation would, in fact, promote *both*—and in such a way that no *conflict* would be perceived between the two!

## Endnote

1. Also see footnote 51, p. 30, of my “[Worship](#)” paper.

## **The Importance of Sincerity**

Alton C. Thompson

A part of the “glue” that holds our society together is sincerity in the communications that occur among the members of our society. It has been [stated](#) regarding this virtue:

First discussed by [Aristotle](#) in his [Nicomachean Ethics](#), it resurfaced to become an ideal ([virtue](#)) in [Europe](#) and [North America](#) in the 17th century; and it gained considerable momentum during the [Romantic movement](#), when sincerity was first celebrated as an [artistic](#) and social ideal. Indeed, in middle to late nineteenth century America, sincerity was an idea reflected in mannerisms, hairstyles, women's dress, and the literature of the time.

Literary critic [Lionel Trilling](#) dealt with the subject of sincerity, its roots, its evolution, its moral quotient, and its relationship to [authenticity](#) in a series of lectures published under the title [Sincerity and Authenticity](#).

Sincerity can be defined briefly as saying and writing with honesty, without an attempt to deceive those hearing or reading one's words. At times, of course, one may choose to allow some other virtue—such as protecting others from needless hurt or harm—to override the virtue of sincerity. Generally speaking, however, it is a virtue that should always be practiced—for if one lacks [integrity](#) in one's thought and behavior, one not only weakens the “glue” that holds the *society* together, but does damage to *oneself* psychologically.

Sincerity is not the only “glue” that helps hold our society together—belief in the society's [fairness](#) being, perhaps, even more important as a “glue”—but sincerity *is*, most certainly, an important one. It can, of course, get one in [deep trouble](#), as Bradley Manning is finding out!

Sincerity is a trait that can be attributed not only to *individuals* but to *organizations*—although, sadly, one does not usually even consider the possibility of attributing this trait to our government! One would like to think, however, that it is a trait that could reasonably be attributed to *other* organizations in our society—with our “religious” institutions leading the list here. However, Pope Benedict's retirement on February 28, 2013, has caused some to say—with good reason!—“[Good riddance!](#)”

I am not aware of any religious institution more [wracked with scandal](#) than the Roman Catholic church, but the church of which I am a member—a Presbyterian one—can at the very least be accused of insincerity. To prove my point, let me begin here by “lifting” from yesterday's (March 3, 2013) church bulletin the Prayer of Confession (which those attending were asked to read aloud, and in unison):

Providing God, You have given us an abundance in creation, but we have misused it. We have hoarded resources from others, abused the resources given to us, and we have damaged and destroyed Your creation for our own desires. We are quick to point out the faults in others, but we have failed to take care of what you have given us. Forgive us for living in ways that are harmful to others and creation. Forgive us for not accepting our own responsibility and doing what we can to change how we live. Call us back to Your ways of honoring Your creation, caring for all created beings and using Your resources for the well-being of all. In the name of [Jesus] Christ, who taught us to live with one another in love, we pray.

Note first here that the word “resources” is used *three* times. Those who wrote/approved this prayer didn’t seem to realize that “[resource](#)” is a *utilitarian* term, not a *spiritual* one. The prayer asserts that God *created* the life forms that exist on the world (thereby in effect rejecting the idea that they *evolved*), but suggests—because of the use of the word “resource”—that those life forms (including human ones?!) were created to be *used* (by *humans*, of course).

In effect, then, having a *control* mentality was given a blessing by this prayer, rather than an *adaptive* one. What’s ironic about this, of course, is that the basic reason that we are currently confronted with the [global warming problem](#) is the prevalence, over the centuries, of a control mentality—beginning, it would seem, with the “Fall” into agriculture about 10,000 years ago!

Does this oversight reflect ignorance, insincerity—or both?! (I regard this as a rhetorical question!)

It’s true that we have been “living in ways” that are, and have been, “harmful to” other humans and—in the case of the global warming that we have caused—other species as well. Indeed, our actions have caused the [extinction of many species already](#), and will likely cause many more extinctions. Given that the prayer insists, implicitly, that *God* created all species—including the ones that have become extinct—it’s obvious, suggests this prayer, *implicitly* at any rate, that we have done something dastardly. But *that* fact doesn’t “come through” in this prayer. Why not? Does this reflect the possibility that the prayer is insincere? (Another rhetorical question!)

And why the ambiguity of “living in ways”? Why not be forthright and state that the development of a control mentality centuries ago has eventuated (through a long causal chain) in a way of life in the United States that is dependent on fossil fuel usage; and that because no alternate fuel exists that could quickly and completely be substituted for those fossil fuels, it’s inevitable that we humans—led by us Americans—will *continue* to intensify the “greenhouse” effect? Unless, that is, we begin to *abandon*, on a large scale, our existing way of life for one that uses only non-polluting fuels?

Given that continuing our existing way of life will only result in more extinctions—of creatures created by God, you claim—are you not committing a grave sin by not *mentioning* this fact, and not advocating an abandonment of our existing way of life in favor of one that would be less

dangerous to ourselves and other species? (Still another rhetorical question!) What is your *reason* for omitting any reference to this matter? Is it insincerity, ignorance—or both, again?

Not only can this prayer be accused of insincerity—along with ignorance. By asking people to *repeat* these words aloud, and in unison, are you not *requesting* them to be insincere? And is that not a sin? Are you denying that [Jesus said this about prayer](#)?:

<sup>5</sup>“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. <sup>6</sup>But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. <sup>7</sup>And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. <sup>8</sup>Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

It seems clear from this that Jesus demanded that people be *sincere* when they prayed; that in praying one should compose *one's own* prayer; and rather saying it in *public*, one should do so in *private*. Yet by your asking people to repeat words that *others* have written—others who, by the way, have been *both* insincere and ignorant!—you are asking them to be insincere. You are asking them to ignore what *Jesus* said (ostensibly) about prayer.

You *claim* that your religion is based on the four canonical gospels, so that what you are doing is *continuing* the religion of Jesus. But *are* you? (A rhetorical question, of course!)

The sins of Presbyterianism may not be as serious as those of Roman Catholicism, but I'm not sure that we humans are in a position to be able to *rank* sins. I *can* say, however, that *I* find the practice of asking people to repeat a prayer in unison odious, if not actually sinful—for it requests that they be insincere.

## **Engelhardt's Angle**

Alton C. Thompson

Tom Engelhardt, co-founder of the [American Empire Project](#), and proprietor of the [www.tomdispatch.com](http://www.tomdispatch.com) web site, in his recent “[Where is Everybody?](#) Why it’s So Difficult to Get Your Head Around Climate Change,” recounts traveling, on February 16 of this year, to “the nation’s capital. The purpose: To attend what was [billed as](#) “the largest climate rally in history” and I haven’t been able to get the experience—or a question that haunted me—out of my mind. Where was everybody?”

The purpose of the rally was to protest against the building of the Keystone XL Pipeline, which, if built “will [bring tar-sands oil](#), some of the “dirtiest,” carbon-richest energy available from Alberta, Canada, to the U.S. Gulf Coast.” Engelhardt had attended the event to “play my tiny part in preserving a half-decent future for this planet, my children, and my new grandson.” An admirable purpose, indeed!

He continued:

After all, to my mind, climate change, global warming, extreme weather—call it what you will—is the obvious deal-breaker in human, if not planetary, history. Everything but nuclear catastrophe pales by comparison, no matter the disaster: 9/11, [70,000 dead](#) in Syria, failed wars, the grimmest of dictatorships, movements of hope that don’t deliver—all of that’s familiar history. Those are the sorts of situations where you can try again, differently, or future generations can and maybe do far better. All of it involves human beings who need to be dealt with or human structures that need to be changed. While any of them may be the definition of “the worst of times,” they are also the [definition of hope](#).

While at the protest,

I noted one slogan on a number of hand-made signs that struck me as the most pointed (and poignant) of the march: “There is no planet B.” It seemed to sum up what was potentially at stake: a planet to live reasonably comfortably on. You really can’t get much more basic than that, which is why hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions, should have been out in the streets demanding that our leaders begin to attend to climate change before it’s quite literally too late.

Engelhardt went on to admit “I’m no scientist. I doubt I’d even be considered scientifically literate (though I try).” *That* fact, it seems to me, becomes evident when one thinks about his claim that there “should have been out in the streets demanding that our leaders begin to attend to climate change before it’s quite literally too late.” Let me, then, develop this point:

I am no more a “climate scientist” than is Tom Engelhardt; and although I enjoy reading the materials that appear on his web site, I am bothered by his complaint that more were not present at the protest in Washington, DC, that he had attended.

Why? Consider the following facts:

- Our society, among many others, is dependent on fossil fuels for producing and transporting that which we need for our day-to-day survival (to say nothing of non-essentials).
- No energy substitute exists to which we could switch quickly and completely.
- Therefore, it’s inevitable that we will continue to be dependent on fossil fuels—for that reason alone (to say nothing of the efforts of the “oil barons” to keep us addicted to oil and other fossil fuels).
- If we haven’t already passed a “tipping point” so far as “climate change” is concerned, it’s virtually inevitable that we soon will.
- When *that* occurs (if it hasn’t already begun) the *negative* feedback mechanisms that had been “working” to resist change will give way to *positive* feedback such mechanisms—meaning that change will be accelerated.
- It’s *conceivable* that geo-engineering measures could be instituted that would have the intent of halting that process, but:
  - It’s highly *unlikely* that this will occur—for our “leaders” in government seem totally unaware of the seriousness of the threat posed by global warming.
  - If it *does* occur, there’s the possibility that those measures will have unintended consequences that will be worse than the “disease” they were designed to “cure.”

Given the above, it would seem that if one is to have any hope of surviving the ravages that global warming is likely to be inflicting on us—is *already* doing so, in fact!—we will need—as individuals (i.e., individual households) acting separately, or as members of small groups—to begin—and ASAP—to engage in *adaptive* activities.



Is engaging in protests an adaptive activity? Tom Engelhardt seems to think so, but I disagree utterly with him on this matter: It is beyond me how one could conclude from the above points that engaging in protests has much, if any, value. It must conclude, then, that Engelhardt is *not* aware of those points.

What I conclude—and reasonably so, I would argue—from the above points is the following:

- Adaptive measures need to be engaged in, and to have the aim of making the individual or group as *self-sufficient* as possible—in food production especially. The reason: As weather becomes increasingly erratic, food production will become affected more and more severely over time. Initially, this will mean that food will become very expensive, but eventually it will mean that it will become virtually *impossible to obtain*—unless one produces it for one’s self or group. Those who are *unable* to obtain food will, of course, die from starvation or disease or violence; and although those who *are* producing food for themselves are not *guaranteed* survival, they at least increase the *probability* of their survival.
- Although some may be able to adapt on an *in situ* basis (having adopted ideas from, e.g., Milwaukee’s [Will Allen](#)), the better choices, it would seem, are to:
  - Become a homesteader.
  - Either join an [existing eco-community](#) or join together with a few others to create a new one.

If protests result in convincing our political leaders to avoid making foolish decisions, they can be of some value. But I have my doubts if President O’Bomber can be convinced to act decisively on the global warming problem matter; and even if he *does* act, he is unlikely to pursue the *right course of action*. Thus, protests are basically not only a waste of time—but are even worse than that. I wish that Tom Engelhardt would not only recognize this point, but would begin *promoting* adaptive efforts.

## **“Obtusivity” [1] on Parade**

Alton C. Thompson

In light of [this recent statement](#) by Malcolm Light [2]

Developed (and some developing) countries must cut back their carbon dioxide emissions by a very large percentage (50% to 90%) by 2020 to immediately precipitate a cooling of the Earth and its crust. If this is not done the earthquake frequency and methane emissions in the Arctic will continue to grow exponentially leading to our inexorable demise between 2031 to 2051.

I find it difficult to believe that what Adam Federman terms the “[Greatest Conservation Experiment in Centuries](#)” deserves that label. I am utterly perplexed: How can one think of oneself as some sort of “environmentalist” and be totally oblivious, apparently, to the threat to us being posed by global warming?!

Actually, the above statement by Light is somewhat misleading, for in the very next paragraph he states:

Geoengineering must be used immediately as a cooling method in the Arctic to counteract the effects of the methane buildup in the short term. However these methods will lead to further pollution of the atmosphere in the long term and will not solve the earthquake induced Arctic methane buildup which is going to lead to our annihilation.

That is, in the first passage from Light’s article quoted above, he advocates a substantial cutback in carbon emissions, whereas in the second passage that solution has seemingly been abandoned in favor of geo-engineering measures. Let us ignore this discrepancy, however, and attend to Light’s prediction that our species will go the way of the dinosaurs (and for the same basic reason—drastic and sudden environmental change) sometime within 20 to 40 years into the future. Granted that Light’s prediction is qualified by his statement that our extinction will occur *only* if we fail to cut back our “carbon dioxide emissions by a very large percentage (50% to 90%) by 2020 . . . .” But given that the probability of *that* occurring is zero (!), what he is actually saying is that our species *is* doomed.

What Federman was referring to in his article was the creation of “a vast network of wildlife habitats. It would connect eco-regions like the southern coastal plains of Georgia to the Appalachians and the Green Mountains of Vermont and from there to parts of southern Quebec, in the process protecting and allowing for the reintroduction of keystone species.” But of what value are such efforts, given the high probability that *our own* species will not be around much longer?! (A rhetorical question, of course!)

The threat being posed to *other* species is also being posed to *our own*; how could it be otherwise?! This should be too obvious a point to make, but evidently is not to Federman. He has somehow managed to become so obsessed with the survival of *other* species that he has blinded himself to *our own* precarious situation. I find it difficult to understand how one can do this—but we humans have a long history of becoming so fixated on certain ideologies, theories, causes, etc., that we are unable to see “what is in front of us”—*literally*, and in terms of the *future*.

What Light’s article suggests (if but implicitly) is that we could just as well resign ourselves to oblivion within a few decades—for (a) it’s unlikely that a switchover to “safe” fuels will occur anytime soon, if ever, and (b) it’s also unlikely to geo-engineering measures will be taken—which is just as well, as they may have unintended consequences that negate whatever positive ones that they have.

But is *resignation* an answer worthy of us humans? As I have been arguing on this site in a number of essays, we must at least *try* to save ourselves by engaging in adaptive measures. What I mean in stating that is that rather than looking to government or business (it goes without saying, regarding the latter!) for “salvation,” we should act as individuals and as directors of private organizations, and initiate a program of creating small, self-sufficient communities designed with both global warming and our “design specifications” in mind (for the latter, see Chapters 2 – 4 in my [eBook](#)).

Ironically, during the Great Depression our national government developed a communities program as a means to provide employment to people (see John Curl’s [For All The People](#), 2012, pp. 315 - 321), [3] but the probability of this occurring now is zero—which is why I say that private individuals must, *today*, “work for their own salvation.”

As an aside, I should mention that this morning (March 6, 2012) I have been having an email exchange with Daniel Kovalik, with reference to a [recent article](#) of his:

This email which I just received from him is appropriate for my own essay:

Yes, we are definitely on the same page. This brings to mind the message of Thomas Merton to a young activist which, in a nutshell, is that in doing activist work, it is the good people we find along the way that matters most:

Do not depend on the hope of results. When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on, essentially an apostolic work, you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results but on the value, the rightness, the truth of the work itself. And there too a great deal has to be gone through as gradually you struggle less and less for an idea and more and more for specific people. The range tends to narrow down, but it gets much more real. In the end, it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything.

Be well,

Dan

I received Dan's last response (from which I quote above) just before sending this essay to Sufyan, and felt compelled to tack the relevant part to the end of my essay. After sending my essay to Sufyan (having copied Dan), I sent him the following:

Dan,

I felt compelled to quote from your last email in my essay—it is so appropriate; I hope you don't mind.

Al

### **Endnotes**

1. I'm not sure if this is a word—but it is now!
2. I wish to thank Robert J. Burrowes (his "[The Race to End Violence Before We End Life](#)") for making we aware of this frightening article.
3. I have found the first (2009) edition of this book on the internet as a searchable .pdf file. If any reader would like a copy, just send me an email and I will supply you with one.

## Scientifically Possible, and *Likely*?

Alton C. Thompson

A [recent article](#) by Kevin Zeese and Margaret Flowers states:

The way forward is through an immediate commitment to [a carbon-free, nuclear-free energy economy](#). [1] Science shows that within 20 years, we can get off of fossil fuels. The transition to a clean energy economy would have the added benefit of creating jobs. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was governor of New York, he established some New Deal-type programs at the state level before becoming president. It is no secret that Governor Cuomo desires to run for president. This is his opportunity to lead the way and build a carbon-free, clean energy economy in New York. We ask: which side is he on, with the oil and gas industry, or with the people?

Their article begins with this statement:

James Hansen's eye-opening article, "[Game Over for the Climate](#)," brought widespread attention to the Alberta Tar Sands in Canada as a source of carbon which, if tapped, would lead to irreversible global warming. There is another climate bomb in the United States, shale gas hydraulic fracking, which emits methane, more dangerous than CO<sub>2</sub>. While many rhetorically call natural gas a bridge to the clean energy future, new information is showing the opposite; natural gas will hasten climate change, poisons the air, land and water, and carries unacceptable risks to our health.

The authors do an excellent job of defending their claim that “natural gas will hasten climate change, poisons the air, land and water, and carries unacceptable risks to our health.” The question asked here, however, is: Are they *justified* in claiming that “within 20 years, we can get off of fossil fuels.” It’s true—and it’s important to make note of this fact—that they preface that claim with “Science shows . . . .” Acknowledging that prefatory remark, the real question here, then, is: **Just because “science shows” that we *could* “get off of” fossil fuels within 20 years, is there a *likelihood* that we will?** And, second, if *not*, is there another avenue that should be pursued?

The *Carbon-Free and Nuclear-Free* report cited by Zeese and Flowers uses as its basic assumption that the answer to the global warming problem is a *scientific/technological* one. Thus, their Chapter 3 (“Technologies—Supply, Storage, and Conversion,” pp. 28 – 72) discusses wind energy, solar electricity, biomass, and a number of other options to fossil fuel usage. This raises three questions, however:

- Are any of these actual *substitutes* for fossil fuels?
- *Can* they be developed quickly enough to avert disaster?

- *Will they be?*

Although I work for an engineering firm, I am not myself an engineer—and for that reason do not feel fully qualified to answer the first of these three questions. It seems to me, however, that insofar as these various alternatives enable the production of *electricity*, they *could* be substitutes for fossil fuels. Therefore, I would give a (qualified) *positive* answer to the first question.

As to the second question—their quick development—I have serious doubts. It seems to me that the fossil fuel companies exert so much influence in our country—and in a manner that emphasizes the continuation of fossil fuel usage—that I simply can’t imagine the total replacement of fossil fuels within 20 years. Even if those firms would either “get out of the way” or even themselves become involved in alternate energy production, I have doubts that a transition could be accomplished within 20 years.

In providing *that* answer, I have also, of course, answered the *third* question posed above.

I should add that I am by no means convinced that disaster could be averted—even if “greenhouse” gas emissions were to cease tomorrow. Were this to occur, the intensity of the presence of those gases would decrease only gradually; and while they are present, they would continue to have an effect.

Geo-engineering efforts *could*, conceivably, be introduced to decrease the effects of those past emissions, but (a) it’s unlikely that such measures would be instituted and (b) even if they were, it’s possible that their unintended consequences would themselves be a disaster.

What I’m suggesting here is that a report such as *Carbon-Free and Nuclear-Free* can have the unfortunate result of lulling people into a sense of complacency. People who become aware of this report may say to themselves that they, as individuals, need do nothing about this problem, because our government, with the help of scientists and technologists, will do whatever is necessary to address it. This will give them a sense of relief, for if they learned, rather, *not* to expect much from government/scientists/technologists, the burden being on *them*, they might not have any ideas regarding what to do—and react in various negative ways, from turning to drink and/or drugs to accomplishing suicide.

The fact of the matter, however, is that if one is to have any hope of surviving the “holocaust” that lies ahead, ***it will need to be through individuals and private organizations engaging in adaptive activities***. As I have commented on that matter in a number of previous essays, I will not add unnecessarily to the length of *this* essay.

## Endnote

1. The link here is to the 290-page downloadable (for free) [\*Carbon-Free and Nuclear-Free: A Roadmap for U.S. Energy Policy\*](#), by Dr. Arjun Makhijani. This report has been published by the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research ([ieer@ieer.org](mailto:ieer@ieer.org))

## **The Boycian Perspective on Global Warming**

Alton C. Thompson

In my recent “The Importance of Sincerity” I stated that “the basic reason that we are currently confronted with the global warming problem is the prevalence, over the centuries, of a control mentality—beginning, it would seem, with the “Fall” into agriculture about 10,000 years ago!” I would now add that this control mentality has resulted in (a) the development of social class and caste systems (with their associated exploitation of some by others); (b) ideologies/theories that bolster those systems (by *justifying* their exploitative nature); and (c) a utilitarian perception of Nature, which perception enables the exploitation of Nature without consideration of the *consequences* of that exploitation, either in the immediate or distant future.

If the only result of this control mentality were the exploitation of some by others, our species could potentially continue on forever. For although if those exploited had the foresight to realize that if they had no offspring, eventually there would be no one to exploit, the fact of the matter is that both the exploiters and the exploited have a sex drive, and that drive overrides foresight with the exploited, so that they continue to produce progeny, most of whom then join the class of the exploited—and exploitation continues . . . .

In the case of the implications of this control mentality for *Nature*, however, physical laws are in operation that result in consequences for *all* humans (to say nothing of other species). It’s true that “when we find problems of environmental degradation, we find problems where some people are benefiting at the expense of other people,” as James K. Boyce (author of the recently-published [\*Economics, the Environment and Our Common Wealth\*](#)) has [observed](#). In the long run, however, and referring here specifically to the threat posed by global warming, *all* humans will be affected by global warming, with *how* this “plays out” depending on how we respond to this problem. Boyce proposes *one* possible response to the problem, but is it an *adequate* one? Let us see.

There *is*, I should note, a possible qualification to my statement above that *all* humans will be affected by global warming. Those who (a) recognize the threat posed to our species by global warming, (b) recognize that it’s now likely too late to halt the further “progress” of global warming,[1] (c) recognize that our “leaders” (in government and elsewhere) are unlikely to address this problem in a timely and meaningful manner, and (d) therefore conclude that (e) adaptive efforts provide the only possible path to “salvation,” with (f) the development of eco-communities, located with global warming in mind, being the best adaptive option; if such individuals—acting either as individuals, or in concert with a few other individuals—then *act* on



their beliefs, they will be *increasing* the probability of their survival—but not *guaranteeing* it, unfortunately.

Given that it's unlikely that *exploiters* will be in this category [2]—and also unlikely that those being *exploited* will be!—ostensibly *no one* will pursue this course and, therefore, *no one* will survive!

The question that arises here, though, is: Is it necessarily the case that *everyone* falls into these two classes of people? *Were* it the case that we had a neat classification here, it's fairly obvious that no one would survive. The fact of the matter, however, is that exploitation is more accurately conceived in *continuum*, rather than *dichotomous*, terms. And *that* fact implies that some of us are more “middling” sorts of folk, so that if our species is to be “saved,” it is up to us to be the saviors!

This may sound rather grandiose, but I do not intend it that way. What I mean to say is that those of us who recognize the above have a *responsibility* to do what we can to try save our species, along with other species. *Each* of us must decide what contribution s/he is capable of making to this end, and then *employ* her/his abilities to the task at hand.

Does this mean that (as Boyce has claimed) “we . . . have to think about how to improve the ability of those who have the most to gain from addressing these problems to make their voices heard and to make their health and well-being and their children's well-being a central issue in the protection of the environment”?

I would answer this question in the negative, arguing, rather, that the need today is (a) to develop a communities program (small, cooperative eco-communities) and to (b) “target” the exploited portion of our population for peopling these communities. That is, I am advocating here a “[last shall be first](#)” philosophy, and for two reasons:

- Such people are less likely to have a control mentality than those who are exploiters. For this reason alone it is such people who should survive the ravages of global warming, and then be involved in creating a New Order.
- The mere fact that they have been mistreated means that they *deserve* better treatment; they have *earned* the right to survival, whereas exploiters have not.

It may sound cruel to exclude exploiters as vanguards of a New Society, but they have “[earned their reward](#).” They have had their opportunity to change the social order, but have failed to do so—and must now get what they deserve, probable death via the various phenomena associated with global warming.

Boyce uses beautiful, inspiring language in [stating](#):

... I think we need to lift up the basic democratic and human rights principles that underlie environmental protection. We're not just interested in protecting the environment and nature for its own sake. It's not just about polar bears or spotted owls. It's about real people here and now, and it's about the well-being of future generations. And we need to think about those people when we're thinking about protecting the environment. We need to think about kids whose life opportunities are being affected by the pollution to which they're being exposed as infants and as small children. Air pollution, water pollution, these are human issues, human rights issues, and we need to be thinking about that and thinking about our commitment as a society to making sure that every child has an opportunity to live to their full potential and to have a productive and healthy and happy life. And I think if we broaden out our concerns with the environment to include our concerns with people, we can broaden the constituencies for doing something about the really serious environmental problems that we face today.

And in his book he states (p. 1) that:

I believe that the fair sharing of our common environmental heritage is not only a real possibility, but also that it is in the process of becoming a reality here in the United States and across the world.

But of what relevance are “broadening the constituencies” and “fair sharing” *given our existing situation*? I applaud Boyce for his concern for the exploited, but am convinced that if he thought more carefully about the problem of global warming (e.g., points “a” through “f” above), he would realize that:

- A severe culling of the world’s population is likely to occur as global warming “heats up” ever more.
- The survivors—if there *are* any!—are likely to be those who have engaged in *adaptive* efforts.
- *That* group is most likely to include those of a “middling” sort so far as the exploitation continuum is concerned, and those others who (a) have *agreed* to be saved of (b) those they have been *chosen* for possible salvation.
- Those in the (a) and (b) categories above are most likely to be those who have been *exploited* rather than those who have been *exploiters*.

The scenario of change that Boyce seemingly has in mind strikes me as unrealistic in comparison with the one that I have offered here. We don’t, as Boyce seems to believe, have “all the time in the world” to address the problem of global warming. It’s essential that it be addressed *now*, and *appropriately* (the *adaptation* option). And even though there is no *guarantee* that all (or even *any!*) of those who engage in adaptive efforts will survive, it seems rather certain that *doing so* will at least increase the *probability* of their surviving.

## Endnotes

1. I say this because we either have passed the “tipping point” relative to “climate change,” or soon will. That is, it’s likely that the *negative* feedback mechanisms that have been “working” to resist change will soon (if they haven’t already!) give way to *positive* feedback mechanisms that will accelerate change. Geo-engineering measures have been suggested by some to combat global warming, but (a) it’s unlikely that such measures will ever be inaugurated and (b) even if they are, it’s possible that their unintended consequences will produce effects worse than the “disease” (i.e., global warming).
2. To be rich is not necessarily to be an exploiter—the case of [Robert Owen](#) being a good example. I am currently about half way through reading the address that he delivered to the U. S. Congress in 1825, and am finding his comments amazing.

## Chomsky “Nails” It (Again!)

Alton C. Thompson

Here’s an [interesting fact](#):

The countries with large and influential indigenous populations [such as Ecuador] are well in the lead in seeking to preserve the planet. The countries that have driven indigenous populations to extinction or extreme marginalization [such as the United States] are racing toward destruction.

How can it be that the “advanced” peoples of the world are so incredibly stupid, while countries dominated by “primitive” people are so brilliant?

Noam Chomsky continues:

In [the] future, historians (if there are any) will look back on this curious spectacle taking shape in the early 21st century. For the first time in human history, humans are facing the significant prospect of severe calamity as a result of their actions—actions that are battering our prospects of decent survival.

Those historians will observe that the richest and most powerful country in history, which enjoys incomparable advantages, is leading the effort to intensify the likely disaster. Leading the effort to preserve conditions in which our immediate descendants might have a decent life are the so-called “primitive” societies: First Nations, tribal, indigenous, aboriginal.

Chomsky was correct to include “if there are any” in the above sentence, for there is no assurance—*regardless of what we do*—that our species will still exist by 2100 CE. For as [Malcolm Light](#) declared recently:

Developed (and some developing) countries must cut back their carbon dioxide emissions by a very large percentage (50% to 90%) by 2020 to immediately precipitate a cooling of the Earth and its crust. If this is not done the earthquake frequency and methane emissions in the Arctic will continue to grow exponentially leading to our inexorable demise between 2031 to 2051.

Given that the likelihood that carbon emissions will be reduced substantially (e.g., 50% to 90%) by 2020 is virtually nil (given the mentalities of our “leaders”), what Light was actually saying is that *by mid century our species will be extinct*.

I must admit that I have difficulty understanding how our “leaders”—most of them having some modicum of intelligence, and some level of education—are able to ignore the threat posed by global warming. If they are not worried about *their* future, wouldn’t it be rational for them to at least be worried about the future—if any!—that their children and grandchildren are likely to

face? One would think that they would have such a worry, but they evidently don't—and, for the life of me, I can't understand why.

Given this truth—this extremely *irrational* truth, indeed!—it follows that it would be *foolish* of those of us who are worried about the future to look to our “leaders” for possible salvation. And although many indigenous people appear to be on the right side of this issue (as Chomsky notes), those of us living in “advanced” countries have a special responsibility to address this problem “head on.” And what *adds* to that responsibility is that we—unlike the indigenous peoples—have ready access to science and technology that may prove useful in helping us adapt—and even helping indigenous peoples survive! I'm referring here to the valuable research that has been done over the years by [John and Nancy Jack Todd](#), by [Will Allen](#) here in Milwaukee, etc.

The reason I refer here to “adaptation” is that because it's likely that we either have crossed a critical threshold with global warming, or soon will, the implications of that strong possibility are that (a) the negative feedback mechanisms that have so far been “fighting” change will give way to positive feedback mechanisms that will, by definition, *accelerate* change; given, then, that (b) *halting* global warming will be an impossibility (even with the use of [geo-engineering](#) measures—which, if implemented, might have unintended consequences that are worse than the “disease”), we are left with but one option—that of *adaptation*. *Trying* to adapt, I should add—because there is no guarantee that even if we do our best in trying to adapt, that we will succeed (i.e., *survive!*).

## **On Stating the Obvious, and . . .**

Alton C. Thompson

The title of a recent article by “The Daily Take” (aka Thom Hartmann)—“[Basing Our Economy on Fossils is Stupid](#)” wins the prize for stating the obvious. Thom notes that:

I lay it out in my book “[The Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight](#).” [1998, 2004] Fossil fuels—like oil, natural gas, and coal—are a captured form of “ancient sunlight” that’s been stored in the Earth for millions of years.

Here I had thought that every educated human living today was aware of the fact that “fossil fuels . . . are a captured form of ‘ancient sunlight,’” but it appears that I was wrong—or is it that Hartmann had a *need* to write an article (under the name “The Daily Take” rather than his real name), and this is the result?!

I will admit that Hartman *does*, in his essay, provide a useful summary of Earth’s geologic history and the development of fossil fuels. But how does this knowledge *help* us today? Are we not *past* the point where we need *history lessons*? Have we not reached a point in time, rather, when we need *answers*? Need, in particular, answers to the question of how best to address the problem of global warming?

But I almost forgot; Hartmann *does*, in fact provide an answer:

We must move away from this absurdity. It’s crazy to rely on dead organic material and ancient sunlight—fossils from millions of years ago—to run our economy and society.

One way we can break our addiction to fossil fuels is to create a carbon tax, so clean energy forms that use modern sunlight energy—from wind to solar to waves—will replace our addiction to dirty fossil fuels.

All across the globe, from Australia to China to Europe, nations have made the decision to break their addiction to fossil fuels with a carbon tax.

This is really helpful! Let me see if I understand the profundities that Hartmann has uttered here:

- It is “crazy” for us to use fossil fuels. When we started using them “900 years ago,” we knew then that they would eventually become a problem, but we foolishly—“crazily,” indeed—went ahead and started using them anyway.
- Despite the fact that we have been “crazy” in our choosing to use energy sources that we *knew* would eventually create problems for us, we need not continue this craziness. We

can—quickly and completely—switch to safe sources of energy such as wind and waves, properly harnessed, and the problem will then immediately go away—like magic.

- How can this magical switchover be accomplished? Why, by instituting a carbon tax, of course. Given that many countries have already instituted such a tax, and we are the most *advanced* country on earth, it will be easy for us to do the same. After all, our politicians—from Congresspersons, to Senators, to President O'Bomber himself—are highly intelligent/educated people, dedicated to serving the public's interest, and we need but *inform* them of this need, and they will immediately *act* on our request.

Evidently Hartmann doesn't know that:

- It's likely too "late in the game" to halt further global warming: A critical "tipping point" either already has been crossed, or soon will be, so that it is only reasonable to expect accelerated change beginning in the near future.
- Given this strong likelihood, efforts to switch to "safe" fuels simply waste effort and time—because they are likely to be fruitless; for global warming is likely to wipe out most of the world's population within a few decades, and in the process cause the collapse of virtually every society on earth. A point that needs emphasis here is that even if we humans ceased pouring greenhouse gases into the atmosphere tomorrow, the effects of *what's already there* would continue to have effects over a long period of time.
- Expecting *our* governmental "leaders" to make rational decisions relative to global warming is naïve beyond belief.
- Because of *that* (likely) fact, along with the other facts stated above, it should be obvious that (a) our only option now is that of trying to adapt to the ravages that global warming will soon be inflicting on us humans (it's already started!), (b) our "leaders" will provide no meaningful leadership regarding this, so that (c) individuals—acting as individuals and as members of small groups (perhaps helped by private organizations)—will need to "take the bull by the horns" and begin engaging in adaptive activities (the creation of small, self-sufficient eco-communities being the most sensible such activities), but (d) even those who follow that path are likely to have but a low probability of surviving. *That* fact should not, however, deter us in an attempt to "save" ourselves—as individuals, and as a species

We humans have never faced a challenge comparable to the one we face today with global warming—a problem of our own making (although we became aware of our complicity only within the past few decades). Because this problem is so serious, it needs to be addressed with

the attentiveness that it deserves—and Hartmann’s essay does not serve that purpose. Instead, it simply magnifies the sense of complacency that already exists. It does us humans a *disservice* rather than a service!



## **“Fiddling While Rome . . .”**

Alton C. Thompson

Here is some [ominous news](#):

"In 100 years, we've gone from the cold end of the spectrum to the warm end of the spectrum," said climatologist Shaun Marcott, lead author of the study [reported in the current issue of the journal [Science](#)]. "We've never seen something this rapid. Even in the ice age the global temperature never changed this quickly."

The question that this raises in *my* mind is to ask: How much more research do we need on this subject? In fact, does not *continued* research deserve the label “[fiddling while Rome burns](#)”?

What I mean in asking this question is that I can understand that scientists, like the rest of us who are employed (*some* of us still are!), believe that they must continue to do their jobs—in this case doing research relative to global warming. But don’t they realize that they are in the same “boat” as the rest of us? That as global warming proceeds, and begins to cull more and more of the world’s population, *they* have as “good” a chance of being culled as anyone else?

Perhaps, though, for them Global Warming is conceived as a Deity, and they believe that this supernatural Being will *spare* them because they have been *worshipping* it in a sense—doing research about it. How else is one to interpret the fact that they continue on their merry way doing research relative to global warming, giving talks about it (e.g., [James Hansen](#) delivered an [address here in Milwaukee](#) yesterday, March 7, 2013), and issuing (overly cautious and/or ambiguous?) warnings regarding global warming from time to time?

What must, of course, be kept in mind here is that just because one is an expert in *explaining* some phenomenon, it does not follow from that fact that one is qualified to propose possible *solutions*—assuming that the phenomenon in question has been identified as a “problem.” The “lever theory” states that if one knows the factors that cause something, one can ask of each of those factors *if* (or the *degree* to which) it is amenable to human action—that is, can be used as a “lever” to bring about change in the phenomenon. Having, then, identified possible “levers,” and determined their relative degree of amenability, the scientist can then make those “findings” available to the general public and to the society’s “leaders.”

But such “research”—although often regarded as definitive for deciding what to do—is easily misinterpreted, including by the scientists who engage in it. The tendency is to assume—tacitly, without any awareness—that the Existing Order must be regarded as a “given.” However,

making such a (tacitly-held) assumption may reveal a lack of sufficient rational thought about why the problem exists—and this is certainly the case relative to global warming.

The scientist, in making recommendations regarding how to “fix” the global warming problem, is likely to make his or her recommendations to government “leaders”—the tacit assumption here being that the problem (a) *can* be solved by government and (b) *will* be.

But what if both of those assumptions are wrong—because, in this case, they are based on an inadequate “diagnosis” of the problem?

The question of *why* a global warming problem exists can be addressed from different perspectives, and it is essential that it be addressed from a perspective that both (a) has a high degree of plausibility and (b) usefulness.

Given those principles, I would suggest that it is not only useful, but “true,” that **our way of life is the culprit**, so far as why we are currently faced with the global warming problem. [1] We have (inadvertently, true) developed a way of life that is dependent on the use of fossil fuels for most of its energy needs, and a shift to “safe” energy sources *cannot* be accomplished quickly—quickly enough to avert disaster, that is. If we address the problem by going down that avenue, we will maximize the probability that few of us will survive—or even any of us, for that matter!

*Changing* our way of life is not possible for *everyone* (because of “[overshoot](#)”), because global warming is likely to cull most of the world’s population within the next few decades—*regardless*. However, those who *do* choose to change their way of life—so that they are occupying what would seem to be a “safe” location, and develop for themselves a self-sufficient (or, preferably, a “community-sufficient”) way of life—are at least increasing the *probability* of survival *for themselves*.

The key here is (a) for some to engage in such activities (perhaps with the help of private organizations and/or some wealthy people) ASAP, and (b) for those people, once “established,” to do what they can to *encourage* (and even *help*) others to do likewise. **The maximum number of people must be saved!**

*Will* this occur? My intention is to keep writing about the matter until some sort of movement gets underway—or I die! I wish that I had the resources that would enable me to do more than “merely” write, but I must face the fact that I don’t.

## Endnote

1. In his talk yesterday (referred to above) Hansen recommended increasing the cost of fossil fuels—to discourage their use relative to alternatives. My response: Too little, too late—and based on an inadequate analysis of the *cause* of the problem (our way of life).



## **My Boiling Blood: Societal Collapse The Solution?**

Alton C. Thompson

Young will die for our sins. He will die for a war that should never have been fought. He will die for the lies of politicians. He will die for war profiteers. He will die for the careers of generals. He will die for a cheerleader press. He will die for a complacent public that made war possible. He bore all this upon his body. He was crucified. And there are hundreds of thousands of other crucified bodies like his in Baghdad and Kandahar and Peshawar and Walter Reed medical center. Mangled bodies and corpses, broken dreams, unending grief, betrayal, corporate profit, these are the true products of war. Tomas Young is the face of war they do not want you to see.

Chris Hedges has [put it](#) far more poignantly and eloquently than I am capable of doing, and in a way meaningful to those of us who are, and have been associated with Christianity. Some might regard Hedges's implicit comparison of Tomas Young to Jesus blasphemous, but one has to be incredibly small-minded to do so.

Tomas Young was featured in *Body of War*, a [movie](#) “directed by [Ellen Spiro](#) and [Phil Donahue](#), [which] is a 2007 [documentary](#) following Tomas Young, an [Iraq War](#) veteran paralyzed from a bullet to the spine, on a physical and emotional journey as he adapts to his new body and begins to question the decision to go to war in [Iraq](#).”

Hedges recently interviewed Young in the latter's small house “on the Kansas City [Missouri] outskirts where he intends to die.” Die for our sins—Hedges adds, with a painful degree of accuracy. For although some of us Americans are more guilty than others for Young's current condition, we all bear part of the responsibility for it. I rarely go to the movies, and as a consequence have not seen the movie; and if it *did* play in a theater in the Milwaukee area, it was likely not heavily advertised, and wasn't played anyway in any theater near where I live. Thus, I was spared the pain of watching the movie—a pain that we Americans *need* to feel, it being a sin that we have been deprived of even *knowing* about the movie.

In two earlier essays ([this](#) and [this](#)) I not only noted that societal collapse—here and elsewhere—appears to be imminent, but that the collapse of *our* society would be a huge benefit to our species. For the military adventurism that this country has been engaging in for many decades now has not only impacted our own citizens—such as Tomas Young—negatively, but countless others throughout the world. The British government has been a force for evil—as, e.g., the movie [The First Grader](#) (which my younger daughter watched this weekend) makes clear; but the American government—with its escapades in foreign countries—has been even more evil,

and all Americans should feel deep shame for the “acting performance” of this country in foreign lands over the years.

How can this evil be halted? We ordinary citizens have little control over our politicians, so it’s no wonder that those of us aware of this country’s evil deeds—via reading William Blum’s *Killing Hope*, for example (also [see](#))—feel so helpless (to say nothing about feeling angry, sad, and ashamed) when we learn about the latest atrocities carried out by our military, CIA, etc.

Is it any wonder, then, that some of us welcome our society’s imminent collapse—even if we may not ourselves survive it? For our society’s collapse would at least mean that the evil being committed by our “leaders” would of necessity cease: Better that *none* of us survive than that our country continue its evil ways, I say.

Although I *do* expect our society’s imminent collapse, and I am aware that Malcolm Light has [stated](#) that:

Developed (and some developing) countries must cut back their carbon dioxide emissions by a very large percentage (50% to 90%) by 2020 to immediately precipitate a cooling of the Earth and its crust. If this is not done the earthquake frequency and methane emissions in the Arctic will continue to grow exponentially leading to our inexorable demise between 2031 to 2051.

—which suggests that we humans *are* headed for extinction, given the unlikelihood that the cut backs referred to by Light are unlikely to occur—I am unwilling to believe that it’s *inevitable* that our species will become extinct shortly.

If we *do* believe this, we give ourselves *no chance* to survive the ravages that global warming will soon be inflicting on us (has *started* to so do!). What we must do, I’m convinced, is to assume that at least *some* of us will survive, especially those who choose to engage in adaptive efforts—such as moving to an existing eco-community, or developing one with a few others.

Doing so will not help the many Tomas Youngs out there—or the victims of our military and CIA—but will at least enable the continuation of our species—perhaps.

## Some Hopeful Trends . . . But

Alton C. Thompson

Imara Jones—“the Economic Justice contributor for Colorlines.com”—[recently identified](#) some important trends in the American economy:

- Toward a more localized economy—the development of “alternative currency” and local food production (e.g., the [Detroit Black Food Security Network](#)).
- Growth of a “sharing economy”:

The formal “sharing economy” through car-sharing services like [Zip Car](#) and the divvying up of living space through sites like [Airbnb](#) is already a multi-billion dollar business. In addition to sharing goods, however, there is also a rise in the sharing of labor through “time banks.”

Jones notes here that: “A key tenet of our current economy is that *individual* consumption creates wealth and well being. [1] But more and more, the opposite is shown to be true.”

- Employees gaining ownership in the companies for which they work. For example, “Cleveland-based [Evergreen Cooperative](#) trusts employees not only to do their jobs but with ownership of the company.”

I agree with Jones that these are all positive trends—but must reluctantly add that *they don’t go far enough*. What they fail to acknowledge is that we are living in a dangerous period of human history—a time when global warming threatens to wipe out our species. As Malcolm Light has [stated](#):

Developed (and some developing) countries must cut back their carbon dioxide emissions by a very large percentage (50% to 90%) by 2020 to immediately precipitate a cooling of the Earth and its crust. If this is not done the earthquake frequency and methane emissions in the Arctic will continue to grow exponentially leading to our inexorable demise between 2031 to 2051.

Given that the cut backs to which Light refers are not likely to occur (because our political “leaders” don’t seem to realize how serious this problem is—or don’t care!), what Light is really saying here is that we are humans *doomed to extinction within a few decades*. The article by Jones, although inspiring, shows absolutely no awareness of this possibility—and I am puzzled by that fact. Granted that our media have not adequately covered the subject of global warming;

but an educated person such as Jones has surely been exposed to competent discussions of global warming, and must have some inkling as to its seriousness.

I *will* say, however, that the fact that trends such as those identified and discussed by Jones are occurring are encouraging because they all represent *pre-adaptation* strategies. Those engaged in them may not be aware of this fact, but as global warming becomes ever more noticeable and ever more damaging, those involved with these trends will find themselves better prepared to confront the threat of global warming than will most people.

What's unfortunate here, however, is that they are not aware—or *sufficiently* aware—of that threat *now*; for if they were, they would realize that their current efforts are insufficient. In coming to that realization, they could come to grips more fully and realistically with the threat. The “mindset” that their current activities reveal tells me that *if* they fully aware of this threat, they would not hesitate to develop coping strategies that were relevant for the severity of that threat.

Of course, Malcolm Light may prove to be right in asserting that we are about to go the way of the dinosaurs. But we must not allow that possibility to deter us from at least *trying* to save ourselves. What I wish is that those engaged in the activities discussed by Jones would realize (a) *that* global warming is occurring, (b) it is likely to wipe out most of the human species (to say nothing of other species), and (c) our only hope lies in engaging in efforts to adapt to the changes that inevitably lie before us—with cooperative eco-community development appearing to be the best of the possible options.

I believe that these people have the *mindset* that would make them receptive to this information, so that all they need is to become better informed. May it occur!

## Endnote

1. A frequently-encountered claim about our economy is that it is about 70% dependent on consumer spending. This claim has, however, been challenged by, e.g., [Michael Mandel](#)—who argues that 40% is a more accurate figure.

## **It's Not Supposed to Be Like This!**

Alton C. Thompson

. . . there are certain aspects of government—like most of them—that disproportionately benefit the rich. Government maintains highways, upon which commerce flows. Government maintains police, protecting the property privileges of the rich. Government air traffic controllers prevent chaos in the skies, allowing vacation and business travel for those who can afford it. Public education trains workers, whose labor can be exploited. Government prisons lock up those who don't respect privilege, who consume unsanctioned products, or whose very being disrupts social order. Public health services prevent pandemics and the possible eradication of humanity, and more importantly, the free market.

There is tremendous irony in what Michael I. Niman [writes](#) here. The public image of our country's plutocrats is that they are *against* government—and would even like to see government disappear. The reality, however, is rather different. They favor massive spending on the military because such spending is a “cash cow” for them. Indeed, as Niman points out, *most* public spending is done for *their* benefit; and if they are for cuts in spending, it is for those programs that benefit those at or near the poverty level. And when it comes to taxes, the plutocrats are perfectly willing to have the greatest burden placed on those with middle incomes—while *they* enjoy loopholes and exemptions not available to the rest of us.

The question that arises here is *why* is this so? That is, *why* is it that some people are so driven by a quest for ever more wealth that they:

- Are seemingly oblivious to their character defects, and oblivious to the harm that they do to others.
- Are so out of touch with their own beings that they don't even recognize that what *drives* them, although giving them material goods, and power, and prestige, does not in fact bring them *real well-being*.

It is all so utterly irrational. It's as if the plutocrats were mere *puppets*—people lacking an ability to make rational choices, and instead controlled, in their behavior, by some unseen Puppet-Master “out there” some place. Which then raises the further question: Assuming that *intentions* can be attributed at least to this Puppet-Master, what *are* they?



Of course, although it almost *seems* that a Puppet-Master(s) is involved here, it is irrational to assume the existence of such a Being. So we are back to the question of trying to explain behavior that is patently bizarre. We can perhaps agree that such behavior *should* not occur—but the fact of the matter is that it *does*; and it would seem that if we are to rid our society of such behavior, we must first understand *why* it is occurring—and *that* appears to be a difficult undertaking.

Is it, for example, occurring because some are *born* with a “natural” proclivity for such behavior? If so, the suggestion is that we develop a procedure for making a diagnosis while a fetus is still in the womb, and upon making a positive diagnosis, that we insist that the fetus be aborted. But is such a diagnosis *conceivable* (no pun intended)? And if possible, how would the policy be *implemented*—given plutocratic control of our society?

If a proclivity for such behavior does not have a *genetic* basis, it must have an *environmental* one—defining “environmental” broadly here. “Environmental” here could include, at least:

- The attitudes and beliefs of one’s parents and *their* friends.
- The attitudes and beliefs of one’s peers—especially the ones with whom one has direct contact, but certainly including ones who can, e.g., be viewed on television.
- The nature of the educational system to which one is exposed.
- Generally-accepted theories and ideologies that are in the society’s “atmosphere”—and which thereby help control behavior in the society unawares. These can be of an economic, “religious,” political, etc. nature.
- Requirements for survival, if not “success,” imposed on one by the workplace.
- Etc.

But even if we grant a role to “environmental” factors, the question arises: Were those factors created via human decisions—deliberate and/or inadvertent—or are they simply “givens”? It’s difficult to believe that they are the latter, which then means that they were human-created. But because it’s also difficult to believe that they were created *deliberately* by humans, it follows that they must have been *unintended by-products* of decisions that *were* intended.

A *type* of decision that would seem to have been especially important as a culprit here is one that led to some sort of *technological* “advance.” For us moderns it seems almost inevitable that when one technological development occurs, and is then widely adopted, one or more

individuals will just “naturally” examine the development from the standpoint of how “good” it is—with perhaps a result of this examination being that “improvements” are then thought of, and then implemented. What we see happening, then, is a constant tendency for “improvements”—if only in the form of model changes—with consequent adoption occurring (perhaps via a diffusion process) through the society. Such developments are fostered by government offices, universities, and business firms.

Technology development has a *history*, but what tends to be *missing* from histories of technological development is the *societal effects* of such developments. Philip Slater [has stated](#):

An enormous technology seems to have set itself the task of making it unnecessary for one human being ever to ask anything of another in the course of going about his daily business. Even within the family Americans are unique in their feeling that each member should have a separate room, and even a separate telephone, television, and car, where economically possible. We seek more and more privacy, and feel more and more alienated and lonely when we get it. What accidental contacts we do have, furthermore, seem more intrusive, not only because they are unconnected with any familiar pattern of interdependence.

One might argue that technological development has its origins in a *control mentality* that began to develop in response to the way-of-life changes that accompanied the Agricultural Revolution around 10,000 years ago, and that especially in recent decades “advancing” developments of a technological nature have had as one major effect *disconnecting* people one from another.

As *that* has occurred, there has been a *loss of empathy* for others, on the one hand, but also a *loss of meaning* in one’s life, on the other hand. As a consequence, in many families one (a) grows up with “unnatural” attitudes and behavioral traits, (b) finds that having such attitudes and traits helps one be “successful” in school, and then college, and finally, (c) the work place.

*Families are*, however, variable, so that people growing up in our society develop these traits to varying *degrees*. Those possessing them to the greatest degree tend to be driven to become “successful” (but unhappy, unsatisfied)—not only in the business realm, but in the governmental one, the educational one, and even the “religious” one.

The Amish are often thought of as being anti-technology, but this is to misunderstand their attitude toward technology. As a community-oriented people—very different from the rest of us, therefore—they make technology decisions (i.e., whether or not to adopt a given technology) on a (a) community basis, using as their primary criterion (b) whether it will, or will not, affect their *way of life* adversely. If a given technology is judged to be one that would affect their way of life adversely, they will not—none of them—accept it. But if they make a contrary judgment, they may choose to accept. It.

Most of us have lacked such community ties, and have suffered the consequences—one being that our government has come to serve the (apparent) interests of the plutocrats. To extricate ourselves from this situation, we will need to follow the lead of the Amish and establish small communities—today paying especial heed to the threat posed to our species by global warming.

## **Wasting Precious Time!**

Alton C. Thompson

John Atcheson has [recently stated](#), with seeming confidence, that:

To mitigate the worse effects of climate change we need massive investments in new energy and transportation infrastructure, a complete overhaul of our agriculture system, and dramatic improvements in the efficiency of our existing and new building stock. This level of investment would, in turn, kick start an economic boom, just as the transition to fossil fuels did more than a century ago.

Which leads me to ask two questions:

- What are the odds that such “massive investments” will occur?
- If they *do* occur, will this be *quickly* enough to prevent global warming from basically destroying our species?

In addressing these questions, a useful starting point is the following quotation from a highly technical [article](#) published in 2012:

Developed (and some developing) countries must cut back their carbon dioxide emissions by a very large percentage (50% to 90%) by 2020 to immediately precipitate a cooling of the Earth and its crust. If this is not done the earthquake frequency and methane emissions in the Arctic will continue to grow exponentially leading to our inexorable demise between 2031 to 2051.

Given that the cut backs that Light refers to here are unlikely to occur, his message in the above passage is best “translated” as asserting that “**our species will become extinct sometime between 2031 and 2051 CE.**”

Let us hope that Light is wrong in making this prediction, but given that the global mean is likely to increase about 3.2° C. between now and the 2060s (see [this](#), p. xiii), it is certainly plausible. Especially given that to date the global mean has increase by “only” about 0.8° C., and the disastrous effects of global warming are already evident.

Although not myself a climate scientist, I think it important to *assume* that extinction is *not inevitable* for our species (within the next few decades), and that if we recognize that our only option now is trying to *adapt* to the changes that will likely be occurring, at least some members of our species will survive.

What's evident from Atcheson's essay, however, is that he has no idea of how serious a matter "climate change" is. What he doesn't seem to recognize is that:

- It's likely now too late to halt the further "progress" of global warming. As a consequence, engaging in efforts to develop alternate sources of energy are likely "too little, too late."
- This implies that efforts at adaptation are the only ones that are currently sensible to engage it.
- Just as our government is unlikely to undertake serious efforts at developing alternate sources of energy (which, if undertaken, would solve nothing), so is it unlikely that our government will provide any significant leadership so far as adaptation is concerned.

Atcheson's thinking, like that of so many others in our society, is based on a view of the future that is unrealistic—terribly unrealistic, in fact. And the unfortunate consequence of articles such as his is that they help contribute to the general somnolence that exists relative to this problem.

If people in our society were aware that (a) global warming threatens the very continued existence of our species, (b) "time is of the essence" in responding to this threat, and (c) that they should expect nothing from their government, so far as leadership is concerned, they could begin to engage in activities that might result in the "salvation" of them, their children, and their grandchildren. I say "might" here because there is no guarantee that *any* of us will survive the ravages of global warming, *regardless* of what we do. This fact should not, however, lull us into a sense of resignation and consequent inaction.

As to the *form* that adaptation efforts should take, I have pointed out previously that the two best options are (a) homesteading and (b) moving to a cooperative eco-community or getting together with a few others to *create* one—with option (b) being the preferred one (if we are to retain any semblance of a civilized existence).

*Atcheson* may believe that an "economic boom" is possible, but so far as I am concerned, it's not even *conceivable*! It's time to "get real," and recognize (a) the seriousness of the problem of global warming and (b) what's necessary for us to have any chance of surviving global warming and its effects. We avoid these matters at our peril!

## **Attention Climate Change Deniers!**

Alton C. Thompson

If climate change deniers are not convinced by the [following statement](#) by Tim Radford, I don't know what will:

Climate is a complicated business, and there is always legitimate room for argument about the validity of one selected set of measurements, a potential bias in the observations, or the reliability of comparison data collected two generations earlier.

But vegetables can't be fooled. Plants grow where they can. If deciduous shrubs are growing taller, and colonizing sites ever further north, then conditions must be getting warmer, and staying warmer.

What Radford is referring to is the fact that using satellite data gathered over the past 30 years, it has been determined that vegetation is now growing **500 miles farther north** than it was 30 years ago. As Radford puts it so well, "Plants grow where they can;" and the fact that they are now growing much farther north than they were just a few decades ago *proves* that climate change is occurring.

This "news" should be convincing to climate change deniers—and might be, were it to be more widely known (which will occur, I hope). But a question that arises here is: *Must* scientists *continue* to engage in this sort of research? Aren't they intelligent and well-educated enough to realize that a tipping point has likely been crossed, or soon will be, so that it is now not possible to halt further global warming? It's true that geo-engineering efforts might be engaged in to achieve that end, but in using the word "might" I am casting doubt on *whether* it will—and my own conclusion here is that it *won't*! And that may be just as well, for if such efforts *were* undertaken, their unintended consequences might be as disastrous as those likely to be associated with global warming itself!

Now if a climate change scientist is aware of the above facts (or high probabilities), s/he can go in one of two directions:

- Continue doing climate change research—because, after all, it provides him or her with the income needed for survival in the short term.
- Realize that the long term must be considered in addition to the short term, so that given the inevitability of further global warming—which warming is likely to cause the collapse of our society in a matter of decades, and a severe culling of our population (to

say nothing of culling elsewhere)—it would be wise to begin NOW to face the terrible possibilities (*probabilities*, in fact) that lie ahead.

Of course, one *must* give attention to the short term, because that is where one is living. But the short-term situation *today* is not what the short-term situation *30 years from now* will be like; so that if one does not act *now* in preparation of what the situation will probably be like 30 years from now, one may find oneself—and one's family—being culled by global warming between now and 30 years from now.

I have no idea how many climate change scientists are thinking about this matter currently—but one would like to think that many of them are, and therefore know themselves to be in a quandary: *How do I survive in the present while simultaneously engaging in activities that prepare me for future eventualities?*

Anyone asking him- or herself this question will realize that what's needed is a change in one's *way of life*. In realizing this, one will simultaneously realize that making such a change is *extremely difficult to do*.

What's unfortunate, then, is that there is not a *movement* afoot aimed at creating a new way of life. I feel confident that *if* such a movement were underway, climate change scientists—those most aware of the *dangers* posed by global warming—would be among the first to *join* that movement.

*If* such a movement existed, and *if* climate scientists were among the vanguard of the movement, the example that they set might convince *others* to join the movement. Thus, (a) what climate change scientists are finding—the vegetation changes referred to earlier—in conjunction with (b) way of life changes by climate scientists themselves might convince a significant segment of the public that they should follow suit.

The problem is that if large numbers join such a movement, there is no guarantee that many—or even *any*—of them will survive the ravages of global warming. *Had* such a movement been initiated 50 years ago, there would be no global warming threat now. But . . .

## **My Hope for a Forum**

Alton C. Thompson

A study published six years ago [stated](#):

Surveys show most Americans believe climate change poses serious risks but also that reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions sufficient to stabilize atmospheric GHG concentrations can be deferred until there is greater evidence that climate change is harmful. US policymakers likewise argue it is prudent to wait and see whether climate change will cause substantial economic harm before undertaking policies to reduce emissions. Such wait-and-see policies erroneously presume climate change can be reversed quickly should harm become evident, underestimating substantial delays in the climate's response to anthropogenic forcing.

The authors of this study—one at MIT, the other at Harvard—are likely correct regarding the survey results reported above. The question that I have regarding these surveys, however, is whether the *questions* that they have been asking have probed the thinking of Americans in a manner that is most *relevant*.

The reason that I ask this question is that in my contacts with people—face-to-face and via email—listening to others speak on, e.g., television, and reading the local newspaper (or even the *Harper's* magazine that I received in the mail a few days ago), what I primarily detect is *disinterest*. I rarely encounter outright *denial*, fortunately; what I typically encounter, rather, is *silence*—which I interpret as *disinterest*.

Yesterday (March 17, 2013) I attended, with a college buddy, a local Unitarian church. That particular church has a Poetry Sunday every year, and yesterday the poetry of [Wislawa Szymborska](#) was celebrated. I especially enjoyed her “[Puddles](#),” because it took me back to my childhood—and made me wonder if *I* had ever thought that

One of them might be bottomless, after all,  
even though it looks just like the rest.

After the meeting I had an opportunity to chat briefly with the pastor—to whom I had emailed a few of my papers two days before—and repeated to him my “obsession” with the global warming problem. I was hoping that he—a well-educated man, I assume—would show some degree of interest in this subject, but was disappointed that his interest in the subject was as “lukewarm” as that of most people with whom I have contact. Today, I sent an email to him, offering to lead one of their “forums” in the future—one devoted to global warming—and I will be interested to find out what his response will be. I suspect that it will be negative—but I hope that I am wrong about this.



I wish that I could understand the tepidity that I typically encounter regarding the global warming problem. Granted that the events that have occurred recently which scientists believe can be attributed to global warming have occurred *elsewhere*, and have not *directly* affected the people with whom I have had contact. Granted also that although these events have been *reported* in the mass media, they have not necessarily been *connected to global warming* by those media. But are the people that I encounter so lacking in intelligence and education that their curiosity has not been aroused by what they *have* heard about global warming? Aroused enough to do some investigating in online and other sources likely to contain sound information on the subject?

Certainly the pastor that I talked to yesterday is not in the category of unintelligent and uneducated; however, he gave me no indication that he was *well-informed* on the subject. Why his lack of curiosity, why his lack of investigation?

Frankly, I am baffled by the disinterest that I encounter on this matter. I can perhaps understand why an older person with no children or grandchildren would lack interest in the subject: This is an *individualistic* society, and the following statements by Philip Slater in [\*The Pursuit of Loneliness\*](#) (1970 edition) may help one understand why Americans are such strange beings:

Americans love machines more than life itself (p. 49)

it is not “practical” in America to make drastic changes, even to save lives. (p. 121)

The American in fact never thinks of other Americans [or others!] at all—it is his most characteristic trait that he imagines himself to be alone on the continent. (p. 131)

If, however, one has children and grandchildren (as I do), it’s to be expected (is it not?) that one will have an interest in *their* future. Thus, I would expect that a parent or grandparent—perhaps especially after reaching at least middle age—in learning about global warming, and the threats that it poses, would feel an *obligation* to learn what s/he could about the subject, and ask oneself: “What can *I* do to ensure that my children and grandchildren have a future—insofar as that’s possible?”

Yet I see so little evidence that such people exist—and that fact bothers me terribly. I can understand somewhat why I have difficulty convincing our son (age 40) and older daughter (age 34)—both of whom are married and have children, two each—regarding the dangers ahead because of global warming: They are preoccupied with their families and their careers. But old codgers like me (I’m 73) who have at least a college education should (a) not only be interested in their children’s and grandchildren’s future well-being; they (b) should have the time—and sense!—to *investigate* global warming, and think about what they can do to *help* their descendants survive the ravages that global warming is likely to be inflicting on us humans within a matter of decades, if not years.

When I reflect on the proposal that I just sent to the pastor in question, I realize that he may find it somewhat offensive. Thus, I plan to apologize to him tomorrow, and send him a proposal that he should find much more palatable. I assume that his church contains some influential people, so that if *they* are informed about some of my ideas related to global warming, and find my arguments convincing, important actions could result.

## **Global Warming and Religion**

Alton C. Thompson

Razib Khan concludes his thoughtful and thorough review of Nicholas Wade's *The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved and Why it Endures* (2009) with [this statement](#):

It is clear that Wade approaches the topic as a nonbeliever in the tenets of specific religions, but admiring of the outcomes and actions of many believers. Like [David Sloan Wilson](#) he seems to look to a future when a religion arises which is rid of its primitive legacies of Bronze Age sky gods. [E. O. Wilson](#) has also expressed a hope for this sort of evolution.

Khan does *not*, however, indicate *why* Wade—or either of the Wilsons—is looking forward to a “better model,” so far as religion is concerned. A possible answer, though, is implicit in this statement by paleobiologist Steven M. Stanley (*Children of the Ice Age: How a Global Catastrophe Allowed Humans to Evolve*, 1998, p. 16):

Interlopers we are indeed. Ironically, we are now engendering environmental changes that threaten to alter the very climatic regime whose origin brought our genus into existence. The fortuitous appearance of *Homo* deserves close scrutiny, as does the trouble-laden proclivity of modern humans to modify our environment—and ourselves.

The supreme irony identified by Steve Stanley—that environmental change *enabled* (even virtually *forced*, one might add), our evolution as humans, and environmental *change precipitated by our actions*, no less, may render us extinct!—leads me to ask (alluding now to the Razib Khan quotation):

**Were religion to “evolve”—or, more accurately, were a religion to develop<sup>1</sup>—that would be generic enough to attract many in our society who have problems with existing religions (the various branches of Christianity in particular), could that religion be helpful in addressing the problem of global warming?**

Ironically, I believe that such a religion already exists!—the problem being that it exists only “on paper” at present. What is needed, then, is for that religion (a) to become wider known, and (b) to become adopted—by those concerned with the problem of global warming in particular. Given that such people are likely to be highly educated, and therefore likely to be attracted *only*

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<sup>1</sup> Just as I object to the use of “natural selection” in cases in which intra-specific competition is not involved (i.e., non-Darwinian uses of the term—which are pervasive, including in the Wade book cited! For more on this see my partially-completed [Ringing the Bell for Darwin](#)), I object to the use of “evolve” with phenomena other than species. For me, “evolve” implies *genetic* change, and where such change is not involved I object to use of the word “evolve.”

to a religion that does not insult their intelligence and knowledge, the “good news” is that the religion in question *is* such a religion! An additional advantage of the religion is that it comes in two “flavors,” one—NeWFism—for those who have need for a religion that has some “feel” of a religion to it, the other one—SIGism—for those who are unapologetically secular.

NeWFism and SIGism are virtually identical, except that NeWFism recognizes the existence of “God”—that term left undefined, however!—whereas SIGism dispenses entirely with the concept of deity.

Two questions, then, need to be addressed in this essay:

- What is the *nature* of this religion?
- *How* can it be helpful in addressing the problem of global warming?

### **The Nature of NeWFism**

In my “[NeWFism: A Religion for the Twenty-First Century](#)” I describe the basic features of the religion, and provide links to two of my works—“[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#),” in which the New Word Fellowship (NeWF) is described; and [What Are Churches For?](#), in which the Structured Interaction Group (SIG) is discussed.<sup>2</sup> Given the fact that the NeWF and SIG are discussed in detail in those previous papers, in the present essay I restrict my comments to a few points of a general nature that I believe are important. What’s especially important about the NeWF/SIG is its “mechanics,” but you will need to read the relevant section in one of the papers mentioned above for information about that matter.

Nicholas Wade, in his book (cited in the first paragraph above) distinguishes—as many others do as well—between “spirituality” and “religion.” For my purposes here, however, that distinction is not particularly meaningful, for (a) I think of NeWFism/SIGism *as* a “religion,” but (b) one in a rather narrow sense. It is a religion in the sense that (a) it involves *meeting*, on a regular basis, with fellow “believers” (or *non*-believers!)—a characteristic of most of those phenomena that go under the label “religion”, with (b) those meetings involving *ritual*—again, a common feature of “religions”.

NeWFism/SIGism involves just *one* ritual, however, *ritualized meetings*.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, meetings are *structured* so that people take turns speaking, with each person present having the opportunity to speak—and each person having the opportunity of being the group’s leader

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<sup>2</sup> The NeWF is also described in my “[An Alternative to Church](#).”

<sup>3</sup> Roy A. Rappaport, in his [Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity](#) (1999) has discussed the importance of rituals at length.

(“Prophet”<sup>4</sup>) for any given session. (See the referenced papers for details.) In featuring “congregants” *discussing*—rather than being *preached at* by a member of the clergy—NeWFism differs considerably from any religion—Christian or otherwise—of which I am aware.<sup>5</sup>

The *direct* purpose of these meetings is to promote what might be termed “spirituality” on the part of those meeting—or, to [use a more](#) “scientific” term

self-transcendence, which consists of three other traits: self-forgetfulness, or the ability to get entirely lost in an experience; transpersonal identification, or a feeling of connectedness to a larger universe; and mysticism, or an openness to things not literally provable. Put them all together, and you come as close as science can to measuring what it feels like to be spiritual.

A “secular” term that might be used for self-transcendence is “natural high,” and a *Biblical* term would be “Spirit-filling” (referring to the reference to a “[paraclete](#)”<sup>6</sup> in John’s gospel).

Note that “self-transcendence,” as defined here involves three elements:

- Getting “lost”—so that one loses a sense of time and place.

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<sup>4</sup> “Prophet” is the leader’s designation in a NeWF. Those participating in a SIG can apply whatever label they wish to their (temporary) leader—including “Leader”! The “Prophet”/Leader for a given session is expected to begin the discussion by saying whatever s/he feels “led” (by the Spirit) to say. I should add here that one should not *worry* about being chosen (using a random procedure!) for being “Prophet for the day”—keeping the following in mind: “Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you [by the Spirit] at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.” (Mark 13:11)

<sup>5</sup> Some readers may be interested in the fact that having participatory meetings—which characterizes both the NeWF and the SIG—has a solid Biblical basis! See, e.g., Brian Anderson’s “[Discovering Participatory Church Meetings](#).”

<sup>6</sup> Given that the *direct* purpose of NeWF meetings is “to promote what might be termed “spirituality,” that fact in conjunction with the fact that the Gospel of John has Jesus say (14:16, 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7) that he will leave his followers with the “paraclete” means that NeWFism would join Quakerism in being **a religion that actually attempts—using the Bible as its basis!—to *continue* the work of Jesus.** But whereas the Quakers wait in silence for the Voice of the Spirit, NeWFism is based on the assumption that that Voice is more likely to be heard in the context of structured human interaction—such as that provided by the NeWF. In addition, NeWFism goes beyond Quakerism in taking the love command seriously. As I noted in my “[The Blasphemy of Church ‘Services’](#),” the typical church meeting is structured in a way that *inhibits* the realization of that “law,” but that NeWFism, with its orientation to interaction with those with whom one is meeting, *promotes* its realization.

- Feeling *connected*—to the others in the group . . . to the universe.
- *Openness*—open to new ideas, including ones that might not be demonstrably “true.”

The NeWF/SIG has the *direct* purpose of promoting spirituality in those present, but it does not follow from that fact that *all* present would experience self-transcendence—because individuals vary in their genetic makeup, their life experiences, their interests, etc. However, it’s entirely conceivable that when some begin to become “high” during a given meeting, a *contagious* effect will occur—so that all, or most, of those present become “Spirit-filled.” This state will last for different periods of time for different individuals—and may (or may not) be regained during the next meeting.

### How NeWFism/SIGism Can Be Helpful Regarding Global Warming

Although gaining a state of self-transcendence is regarded as a desirable *end* in itself, more importantly it is regarded as a *means*. That is, participation in a NeWF will likely have a number of important *consequences* for those attending—all of them of a positive nature. (For a rather lengthy discussion of the matter see pp. 56 – 67 in “Worship,” cited above).

This is not to say that NeWF participation is the *only* path to self-transcendence—for being in a certain environment (natural or human-made—such as a cathedral), listening to music, playing, dancing, etc., may also lead to self-transcendence. But NeWF participation *can*, I believe, play an important role in bringing about this experience—and has the *specific* advantages that it can result in (a) *creative thinking* about *how* to address, e.g., the problem of global warming and, once ideas have been generated, can (b) result in *enthusiastic pursuit* of possible answers/solutions.

As I noted in footnote 4, the Prophet/Leader for a given session is expected to feel free to discuss whatever happens to be on his/her mind that day—whether or not it relates to global warming. The expectation, however, is that that person would *usually* say something about global warming—given the characteristics of those drawn to the NeWF/SIG in the first place—but even presentations about matters other than global warming can be of value in that they can result in making the group more solidary.

As to the *kinds* of ideas/decisions, occurring during NeWF/SIG sessions, that would be helpful for addressing the global warming problem, refer to the Appendix.

*A final point—and it is an important one: Although the above discussion insists on the need for the creation of a new religion, there is no reason why **existing** groups—congregations of various churches, etc.—could not adopt the NeWF as, e.g., a substitute for an adult class—or a new type*

of adult class. After all, the NeWF—and especially the SIG (discussed in my [eBook](#)) is generic enough that virtually any existing group—including “secular” ones—could embrace it.

## Appendix: Can We Beat Global Warming?

**My short answer: “In one way, ‘No!’, in another way, ‘Perhaps’.” Sorry, but that’s the best that I can do! Let me now indicate *why* I give that answer:**

Despite my title, I wish to address *three* matters here:

- Global warming as an *atmospheric phenomenon* (set of phenomena, actually).
- Its *implications* for humans.
- *Responding* to global warming.

Regarding the second point, I recognize that global warming has implications for many, if not most species, but I limit my attention here to its implications for *humans*. In doing so, it is not my intent to offend anyone.

### Global Warming *Per Se*

My starting assumption here is the fact that global warming *is* occurring,<sup>7</sup> so that there is no need for me to begin by providing *evidence* in support of that fact. In addition, I feel no need to *defend* the proposition that the *reason* that global warming is occurring is that our burning of fossil fuels, beginning around 1750 CE (i.e., the beginning of the Industrial Revolution) has involved the transfer of carbon (in the form of coal, petroleum, and natural gas especially) from below the earth’s surface to the atmosphere, in the form of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>)<sup>8</sup>, thereby increasing the atmosphere’s “[greenhouse effect](#).” We need “[greenhouse gases](#)” in the atmosphere for our existence (and the existence of other forms of life); but an *increasing* concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere (i.e., an increasing greenhouse effect) represents problems for us and other forms of life, as we shall see.

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<sup>7</sup> The “deniers” have been answered well by James Hoggan, with Richard Littlemore, in [Climate Cover-Up: The Crusade to Deny Global Warming](#), 2009.

<sup>8</sup> A more recent concern is the release of methane gas as the thawing of permafrost occurs in the arctic. See, e.g., [this](#). Methane is far more potent than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas.

Earth, as you may or may not know, is not heated *directly* by the sun but, rather, *indirectly*. The energy coming to earth *from* the sun is in the form of *short-wave* energy, for which the atmosphere is transparent. When the sun's rays strike the earth, and those rays are absorbed rather than reflected, earth warms, and then *re-radiates long-wave* heat energy into the atmosphere. The *presence* of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere enables some of that heat energy to be “trapped,” which thereby enables the heating of earth—and maintenance of the earth's “[energy budget](#).”<sup>9</sup> But if the concentration of greenhouse gases in the lower atmosphere begins to *exceed* the “normal” level of concentration, a heating trend in the atmosphere begins to occur.

Two features of this heating trend are of especial concern to climate scientists because of their relevance for humans—which features *should*, therefore, be of concern to *everyone*.

First, there is the matter of what is called “climate change commitment,” regarding which the following has [been stated](#):

Recent [models](#) forecast that even in the unlikely event of greenhouse gases stabilising at present levels, the earth would warm by an additional 0.5°C by 2100, a similar rise in temperature to that seen during the 20th century. As ocean waters expand in response to this warming, global [sea levels](#) would mount by about 10 centimetres during that time. These models do not take into account [ice cap](#) and [glacier](#) melting; including those [climate feedback](#) effects would give a 1°C - 1.5°C estimated temperature increase.

That is, if *everyone* on earth were to stop emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere *tomorrow*, the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere would begin to decrease—but would not return to a “normal” level for a very long period of time. What this means is that the “excess” greenhouse gases in the atmosphere would *continue* to have an effect, so that by 2100 CE the increase in the global mean temperature *solely* attributable to this factor is likely to be between 1° C and 1.5° C. Such an increase may *seem* small, but as we shall see shortly, such an increase *would* actually be highly significant.

From a *human* standpoint, the reason this factor of “inertia” is so important is that if we wait until the effects of global warming are *clearly evident* (they are certainly *beginning* to be!), it will then be too late to halt further warming.

Why is such halting so important? This brings us to the *second* feature of global warming that makes it such an insidious problem, that of a “[tipping point](#).” This refers to that point in time when the increased heating of the atmosphere causes the *negative* feedback mechanisms associated with Earth System—mechanisms that have so far been “trying” to maintain relative

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<sup>9</sup> That is, the amount of heat energy *escaping* from earth into outer space is kept about equal to the amount of heat energy *re-radiating from* earth—so that the global mean temperature remains relatively constant over time.



stability by “fighting” climate change—“give up,” and then give way to *positive* feedback mechanisms, which will “work” to *accelerate* change. Last year, Bill McKibben, in his “[Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math](#),” noted that so far (i.e., since about the time that the Industrial Revolution got underway) the global mean temperature has increased by “only” about 0.8° C.

He went on to point out, though, that the consensus with climate scientists is that an increase of about 2° C. is the critical amount—for reaching, and then crossing, the tipping point. However, McKibben noted: “NASA scientist [James Hansen](#), the planet’s most prominent climatologist, is even blunter: ‘The target that has been talked about in international negotiations for two degrees of warming is actually a prescription for long-term disaster.’” And McKibben then observed that hurricane specialist Kerry Emanuel of MIT would go even farther than most of his colleagues, placing the relevant amount at just 1° C.

If we *conservatively* assume a “built-in” increase of 1° C. (derived from the above quotation), it is clear that *Emanuel’s* critical point would *inevitably* be met and crossed; and the *consensus* point of 2° C. would *almost* be crossed (i.e.,  $0.8^{\circ} + 1^{\circ} = 1.8^{\circ}$ ) at some point in the future; and if we use the 1.5° C. “built-in-increase” value instead, even the consensus value of 2.0° C. will *inevitably* be met and crossed, the only question being *when*. This matter of “when” is extremely important, because after the tipping point is crossed, climate change can be expected to *accelerate*, and a severe culling of the world’s population is likely to occur—*regardless* of what we humans then do to address the matter.

When will the “tipping point” be reached, and crossed? Fred Pearce<sup>10</sup> says this:

Nobody is quite sure when the tipping point might occur. “It is possible,” says [Peter] Cox<sup>[11]</sup>, “that the 2003 surge of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere is the first evidence.” But while some parts of the biosphere may now be irrevocably stuck as carbon sources, the entire system is likely to take a few decades to switch. But of course, much will probably depend on how fast we allow temperatures to rise.

Cox suggests that 2040 is probably when the biosphere will start taking revenge on us for relying on its accommodating nature.

That is, Peter Cox believed—as of 2008 CE—that a tipping point would be reached, and crossed, by 2040 CE. I suspect, however, that given the current concern regarding [methane gas](#) being

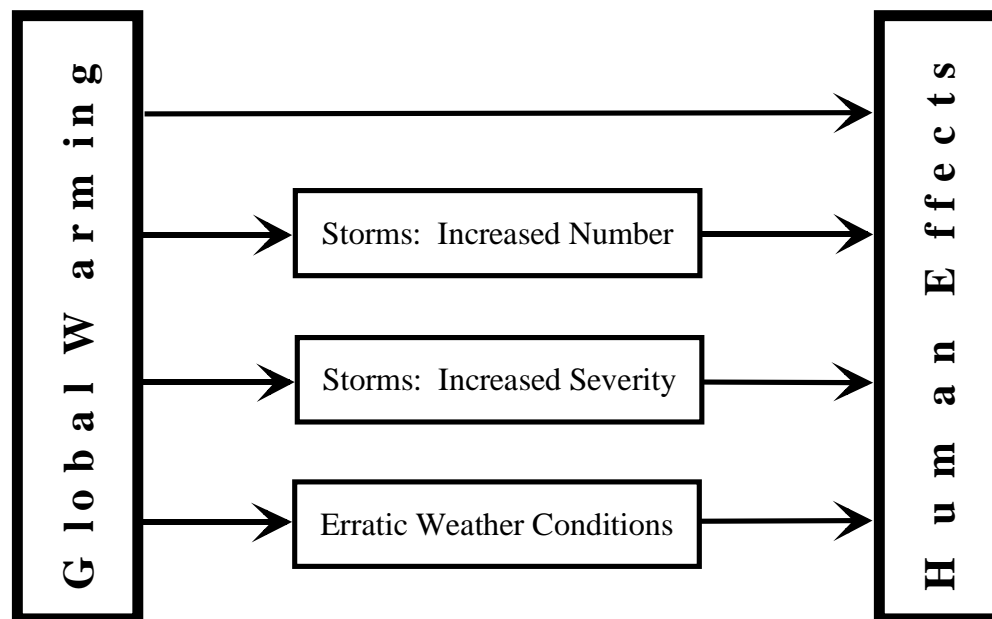
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<sup>10</sup> Fred Pearce, [With Speed and Violence: Why Scientists Fear Tipping Points in Climate Change](#), 2008, pp. 75 – 76.

<sup>11</sup> Cox works at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, at Winfrith, in [Dorset](#)—a [county](#) in [South West England](#) on the [English Channel](#) coast.

emitted in arctic regions, he might *now* move that date somewhat closer. Which is by no means “good news,” of course!

Before proceeding further here, it advisable to recognize that global warming is (a) a cause of *other* atmospheric phenomena, and that (b) it is not just global warming *per se* that has relevance for humans, but also (c) the atmospheric phenomena *caused* by global warming—a fact depicted by the figure below:



What this figure indicates is that global warming has both *direct* and *indirect* effects on humans, the latter by way of causing certain atmospheric phenomena that *themselves* then affect humans:

- An increase in the *number* of storms,
- An increase in the *severity* of storms, and
- *Erratic* weather—warm when it “shouldn’t be, rainy when it “shouldn’t be, etc.

*All* of these aspects of “global warming” will be—already *are*, in fact!—presenting problems for us humans, and it is important to keep the fact of global warming’s various “dimensions” in mind (which is why I referred earlier to global warming as a “*set* of phenomena”).

## Global Warming's Implication for Us Humans

As to *how* global warming will affect us over time, one thing that has bothered me about the global warming literature is the absence in it of any sort of *scenario* of likely change. Thus, recently, while [reviewing](#) James Lovelock's [\*The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning\*](#) (2009), I presented the following brief scenario:

As global warming proceeds, it will, of course, affect some individuals more than others in the early years; but as I wish to use a *societal*, rather than an *individual*, perspective here, the first point that I would make is that global warming would cause disruptions in the economy. Some producers of necessities (food, most notably) would find that their products were damaged (directly or indirectly) by global warming, thereby lessening the quantity of their items on the market—and increasing the prices for those items. Initially, the amount of damage, and resulting price increases, might be minimal enough that people could substitute one item for another, and still survive comfortably. However, as the amount of damage—both in terms of number of items affected, and damage to a given item—increases, food shortages will develop, and people will begin to acquire necessities by theft—using violence if necessary—rather than purchase. Indeed, a point will be reached where economies begin to collapse—meaning that the production of many items will cease, and the transportation of items from one place to another will also cease. When *this* occurs, people will begin “dying like flies” as a result of starvation, disease, and violence—to say nothing of premature deaths resulting from excessive heat, storms, floods, fires, etc.

As a crisis develops, governments can be expected to step in to respond. But as governments begin to lose their personnel because of global warming and otherwise lose their ability to act, they will also break down—leaving behind a situation of utter chaos. People will start wandering around, abandoning the cities, in search of food, so that even those who have anticipated the consequences of global warming, have moved to a “safe” location, and have attempted to engage in adaptive behaviors may find desperate people at their doors—and faced with the question: “Should I try to help these people, or should I shoot them so that at least I and the members of my family have a chance to survive.” A difficult choice—one that I hope that I am never faced with (unlikely because of my age, but I have four grandchildren [with another one now on the way], and hope that they are not faced with such a dilemma).

Here's why I believe that a scenario such as the one above is of value:

- It gives global warming a *human dimension*. So much of the literature on the subject is just concerned with global warming as such, without reference to its various *implications*. Of course, if one's training is in Physics and Chemistry, that training lacks relevance for commenting on the matter of implications.
- It makes global warming seem more *real*. Put another way, it gives the subject some “life.”

- It helps make clear the point that global warming is, in fact, an *extremely serious* problem—a problem that involves *all* of us *intimately*.
- Most importantly, the potential value of such a scenario is that it may help *motivate* people to respond to this threat. That is my *hope*, at any rate.

If my scenario above “downplays” the severity of the threat posed by global warming, others have been more explicit about this matter. For example, here is statement regarding the matter by one scientist, Malcolm P. R. Light, near the end of a [highly-technical paper](#):

- Developed (and some developing) countries must cut back their carbon dioxide emissions by a very large percentage (50% to 90%) by 2020 to immediately precipitate a cooling of the Earth and its crust. If this is not done the earthquake frequency and methane emissions in the Arctic will continue to grow exponentially leading to our inexorable demise between 2031 to 2051.

(Light is associated with [CPOM](#), the Centre for Polar Observation & Modelling.)

Paleobiologist Steven M. Stanley ([Children of the Ice Age: How a Global Catastrophe Allowed Humans to Evolve](#), 1998, p. 16) has noted the irony involved here:

Interlopers we are indeed. Ironically, we are now engendering environmental changes that threaten to alter the very climatic regime whose origin brought our genus into existence. The fortuitous appearance of *Homo* deserves close scrutiny, as does the trouble-laden proclivity of modern humans to modify our environment—and ourselves.

That is, environmental change *enabled*—indeed, virtually *forced*—us humans to evolve, and *now* environmental change—brought about by *our actions*!—may result in our demise as a species! Light’s suggestion that we might go the way of the dinosaurs is a hard idea to “wrap our minds around”—because the problem that we are faced with today is unprecedented in our history. Light’s words *should*, however, be taken seriously—especially given that the likelihood that our “leaders” will act decisively to confront this problem is close to 0.00!

It’s true that Light’s conclusions *have been* [questioned](#), but *that* fact should not cause us to “brush off” his warning. After all, scientists are often critical of one another’s work—not out of spite, of course (usually!), but out of respect for the Truth.

I should add here that Britain’s Kevin Anderson is another scientist who has been vocal in [emphasizing the threat](#) posed by global warming:

In a devastating speech at the University of Bristol Tuesday November 6th, 2012, [Professor Kevin Anderson](#) accused too many climate scientists of keeping quiet about the unrealistic assessments put out by governments, and our awful odds of reaching global warming far above the proposed 2 degree safe point.

In fact, says Anderson, we are almost guaranteed to reach 4 degrees of warming, as early as 2050, and may soar far beyond that - beyond the point which agriculture, the ecosystem, and industrial civilization can survive.

To view a video of Prof. Anderson's [Cabot Institute](#) Annual Lecture (2012)—“Real Clothes for the Emperor: Facing the Challenge of Climate Change”—go to [this site](#). I have already quoted a statement by James Hansen, but also see his [web site](#), and that of [Clive Hamilton](#).

## Responding to the Threat

This brings us, then, to the question of how we might best *respond* to the threat that global warming poses—not only to us humans, but many other species, of course. Put another way: *What can we humans do to “falsify”—to some degree at least—the “picture” that I have painted in the scenario that I presented above?*

Because of this topic's importance, I have thought it necessary to discuss the matter in three subsections:

- The presentation of a chart that identifies the different *actors* in this drama, and the sorts of *activities* that might be associated with each actor.
- Some *explanatory* comments regarding each actor-activity combination to provide some clarification of the activity identified. Each set of comments will be identified with an Arabic number (e.g., “1”) representing the *actor* in question, and a lower-case letter (e.g., “a”) representing a potential *activity* associated with that actor.
- Critical comments directed at each of the actor-activity combinations.

The paper will conclude with a “Conclusions” section (which would seem to be appropriately named!).

### *The Chart*

Actors	Activities
1. Business Firms	a. Cease producing polluting energy. b. Research the development of “safe” energy sources.
2. Governments (federal in particular)	a. Tax fossil fuel firms heavily. b. Fund “safe” energy research. c. Institute a program of geo-engineering. d. Initiate an eco-community program. e. Population reduction measures.
3. Private Organizations (e.g.,	a. Programs to support <i>in situ</i> adjustments.

foundations, religious groups, fraternal organizations, etc.)	b. Programs to create eco-communities.
4. Individuals	a. Try to influence the decisions of political/business leaders. b. Engage in <i>in situ</i> adjustment activities. c. Move to an existing eco-community. d. Create, with a few others, an eco-community, and then move to it. e. Move to a rural location and begin to homestead. f. Accomplish suicide.

### ***Explanatory Comments***

#### **Warning**

*In a very real sense, much of the discussion in this section is pointless, because we have already established that it's virtually certain that a critical tipping point will be crossed "soon," with a severe culling of the world's population then occurring—for it will then not be possible to halt further warming.*

*[Joe Romm](#) recently made this [sobering statement](#):*

As a NOAA-led paper explained 4 years ago, climate change is "[largely irreversible for 1000 years](#)."

*He then added:*

This notion that we can reverse climate change by cutting emissions is one of the most commonly held myths—and one of the most dangerous, as explained in this 2007 MIT study, "[Understanding Public Complacency About Climate Change: Adults' mental models of climate change violate conservation of matter](#)."

*Given (a) the high probability that a tipping point will be reached before 2040 CE, (b) that "climate change" will then accelerate, (c) a consequence being that most of the world's population will be wiped out, the only discussion below with any real relevance is that under points 2.d, 3.b., 4.c., 4.d., and 4.e. below. Nevertheless, I feel an obligation to comment on all of the points identified in the chart above.*

## Business Firms

### 1.a. Cease Producing Polluting Energy

There are firms that *produce* energy (e.g., gasoline), on the one hand, but *all* firms are *users* of energy. The former sort of firms could cease producing fuels with a fossil fuel basis, and other firms could strive to *minimize* their use of such fuels.

### 1.b. Research the Development of “Safe” Energy Sources

Firms have been developing solar panels (and ideas for the use of “passive solar), windmills for generating electricity, and fuels from biomass, and this research and development could continue.

*Saving* energy is also of significance, and [John](#) and Nancy Jack Todd have been engaged in important *design* research that has great relevance for this purpose—[these three books](#) being examples. Today, their efforts have particular relevance for those engaging in efforts to *adapt* to the ravages that global warming will soon be inflicting on us.

## Governments

### 2.a. Tax Fossil Fuel Firms Heavily

Governments could levy a substantial tax on, e.g., gasoline—in an effort to encourage fossil fuel firms to pursue other business interests, and simultaneously encourage those and other firms to step up efforts to create “safe” energy sources.

### 2.b. Fund “Safe” Energy Research

If governments *want* something done, and know that only government funding will ensure that it *gets* done, it will fund efforts to get that something done; the federal government *is* currently providing incentives for the development of “safe” energy, and could continue, and even intensify, those efforts.

### 2.c. Institute a Program of Geo-Engineering

“Geo-engineering” is a term that encompasses a [number of different activities](#), and some—or all—of such activities could be encouraged, via various incentives, by governments—the federal government in particular.

## 2.d. Initiate an Eco-Community Program

John Curl, in his [\*For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America\*](#)<sup>12</sup> (2009) notes (pp. 315 – 322) that during the Great Depression the Roosevelt administration inaugurated a communities program, stimulated largely by [Ralph Borsodi](#)'s [\*Flight From the City\*](#) (1933). A similar program—but having global warming as its focus, rather than unemployment—could be instituted today.

## 2.e. Population Reduction Measures

Regard the following as a “venting” sidebar that expresses my moral outrage regarding the behavior of our country:

Killing has been one of this country's major pastimes from the very beginning—involving the indigenous peoples of this country, the killing of civilians in Vietnam, our support of “death squads” in Latin America, the killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians in Iraq, and our current killing of women and children through drone strikes. Given that our Nobel Peace Prize-winning president has now even arrogated to himself the right to kill *our own* citizens upon his order, this raises the question: Why not have our Air Force bomb New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta, etc., in an effort to reduce pollution by eliminating those who produce it?! And if *that's* not acceptable, why not induce *some other* country to do this to us? After all, is there not a precedent for this in the Roosevelt administration's efforts to induce the Japanese to attack Pearl Harbor?—a plan that worked, and enabled us to enter World War II. (See Robert B. Stinnett's [\*Day of Deceit\*](#), 2001.)

There, now I feel better!

## Private Organizations

### 3.a. Programs to Support *in situ* Adjustments

[Will Allen](#) here in Milwaukee has been engaged in some important research and activity relative to increasing self-sufficiency, and such work could be expanded considerably were private organizations to provide the necessary financial and other needed assistance.

### 3.b. Programs to Create Eco-Communities

In the 1930s and 1940s Arthur E. Morgan—a Unitarian who turned Quaker—became a supporter of small communities, and wrote [\*The Small Community\*](#) (1942). The importance of “scale” was taken up later by Kirkpatrick Sale in his [\*Human Scale\*](#) (1980). These gentlemen advocated the

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<sup>12</sup> The link here is to the *book itself*, not merely a description of it!



small community for reasons *other* than addressing the problem of global warming, but their reasons for supporting small community are still valid—and will achieve fruition only if some individuals or private organizations step forward to promote the idea. What needs to be added to the idea *today*, however, the fact of global warming.

## Individuals

### Note

*Except for point 4.a. below, the other options all assume that global warming cannot be halted, so that the only meaningful response is trying to adapt to the changes that will be inevitably occurring.*

#### 4.a. Try to Influence the Decisions of Political/Business Leaders

One option that individuals have is to voice their concerns to our political and business leaders. This can be done by writing letters, sending emails, going to the offices of political leaders, participating in protest marches, etc. Bill McKibben's [350.org](http://350.org) is an example of one citizen's efforts to raise the public's awareness regarding global warming.

#### 4.b. Engage in *in situ* Adjustment Activities

If one is aware of what Will Allen is doing here in Milwaukee and what others are doing and writing about elsewhere that pertain to “in place” adaptive measures, one could experiment with some of these ideas—and develop one's own. If one does the latter, and believes that one has developed some good ideas, one can attempt to publicize those ideas.

#### 4.c. Move to an Existing Eco-Community

At present, there are numerous “[intentional communities](#)” in this country, including right here in [Wisconsin](#). Some of these are eco-communities, some are not—so that if one is considering this option, one will need to “check out” any communities that one is considering. This would include determining whether or not a given community is accepting new members.

#### 4.d. Create, With a Few Others, an Eco-Community, and Then Move to It.

If one finds the eco-community option attractive, but is not satisfied with existing ones of which one is aware (for social, distance, etc., reasons), one can consider getting together with some others with the same interest in one's locality, purchase the necessary land, make plans for the community, and then build it (or *have* it build by professionals).

#### 4.e. Move to a Rural Location and Begin to Homestead

If one believes that “staying put” is a recipe for disaster, but is somewhat of “loner,” rather than considering the eco-communitarian option one might consider [homesteading](#).

#### 4.f. Accomplish Suicide

This is not to *recommend* suicide as a “way out,” but simply to acknowledge that just as many veterans today are “suiciding,” so is in highly probable that as global warming “progresses,” this option will be taken by more and more people.

### ***Critical Comments***

#### **Business Firms**

##### 1.a. Cease Producing Polluting Energy

Those firms which currently *produce* energy derived from fossil fuels may *claim* that they are interested in developing “safe” alternatives, but why should we *believe* them?! Does not, e.g., the [Keystone pipeline](#) project prove otherwise? The executives of these firms seem to be obsessed with next quarter’s “bottom line,” and for some unfathomable reasons don’t seem to recognize that global warming is a *global* problem that will affect *them* along with everyone else! Firms *using* energy derived from fossil fuels are primarily in interested in the *costs* that they incur in using energy, and unless their managements have a concern for global warming, they are unlikely to switch to “safe” energy sources unless such sources are cost-effective.

##### 1.b. Research the Development of “Safe” Energy Sources

I should first note here that regarding fuels derived from biomass, at any rate, questions regarding degree of “safety” have arisen recently.<sup>13</sup> The important question that arises here, however is: *Can*—and *will*—developments in this area *occur* quickly enough, and be *implemented* quickly enough, to prevent a tipping point be reached and crossed? I, for one, have serious doubts about this.

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-gibbs/post\\_4087\\_b\\_2073600.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-gibbs/post_4087_b_2073600.html), [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-gibbs/the-biomassacre-marches-o\\_b\\_2103396.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-gibbs/the-biomassacre-marches-o_b_2103396.html), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOSRHKsoZJ8>, and [www.greenillusions.org](http://www.greenillusions.org).

## Governments

### 2.a. Tax Fossil Fuel Firms Heavily

Given the “clout” that the fossil fuels exert in this society, in the first place this is not likely to occur. But if it were to occur, it’s burden would fall especially on lower-income people—for our society has developed around the principle of cheap energy, so that *all* of us are dependent on fossil fuels today (gasoline and natural gas in particular), and any increases in their cost would add to the misery of those with lower incomes. In addition, even were this measure to be implemented, it would offer no guarantee of preventing a tipping point from being reached and crossed—eventuating in massive culling of populations here and elsewhere.

### 2.b. Fund “Safe” Energy Research

Ostensibly this is a good idea—but it may be “too little, too late.” That is, it would appear that we are close to a tipping point (if we have not already reached it!), so that such an effort is unlikely to be effective.

### 2.c. Institute a Program of Geo-Engineering

Geo-engineering measures would need to be sponsored by the national government, and can have the advantage—“theoretically”—of having quick results. Malcolm P. R. Light (*op. cit.*) has, however, said the following about geo-engineering measures:

- Geoengineering must be used immediately as a cooling method in the Arctic to counteract the effects of the methane buildup in the short term. However these methods will lead to further pollution of the atmosphere in the long term and will not solve the earthquake induced Arctic methane buildup which is going to lead to our annihilation.

In effect, he is saying here that “you’re damned if you don’t”—but also “damned if you do”!

Steve Horn (a blogger who lives in Madison, Wisconsin, and writes for [DeSmogBlog.com](http://DeSmogBlog.com)) recently sent this to me:

As I always tell people concerned about environmental issues whose response is a "techno-fix," "be careful for you wish for, it might come true."

I recommend reading the links below. Geo-engineering is *not* any sort of solution anyone who cares about building a just society should be advocating for. Neither are "techno-fixes" at-large.

<http://www.etcgroup.org/content/geopiracy-case-against-geoengineering>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/oct/15/pacific-iron-fertilisation-geoengineering>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/jul/17/us-geoengineers-spray-sun-balloon>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/oct/17/canada-geoengineering-pacific>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/28/opinion/sunday/geoengineering-testing-the-waters.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

Also, see Clive Hamilton's recent (2013) [\*Earthmasters: The Dawn of the Age of Climate Engineering\*](#).

It would appear, then, that there are serious risks in taking this approach—that because of the unintended—and unforeseen—consequences of such measures, they might actually be worse than the “disease” itself, i.e., global warming!

#### 2.d. Initiate an Eco-Community Program

This would be a great idea, and (as I indicated earlier) would have a precedent in our history; however, the probability of such a program being initiated is 0.00!

#### 2.e. Population Reduction Measures

I would *hope* that such measures would not be implemented, but given the dastardly, nefarious activities that our government has been involved in in the past (see, e.g., [William Blum's site](#), and the [McCollum memo](#)), it is not unthinkable that it would engage in such measures in the near future.

### **Private Organizations**

#### 3.a. Programs to Support *in situ* Adjustments

Another rather good idea—but I see no evidence that private organizations are doing much, if anything, along this line.

#### 3.b. Programs to Create Eco-Communities

The same for eco-communities.

## Individuals

### 4.a. Try to Influence the Decisions of Political/Business Leaders

Such efforts *are* being engaged in, but my personal view is that they are an utter waste of time—because the likelihood of our leaders heeding warnings regarding global warming approach 0.00.

### 4.b. Engage in *in situ* Adjustment Activities

Given that such activities, because they would not involve physically moving to a different location, are “doable,” and I would like to see more people investigate what, e.g., Will Allen is doing right here in Milwaukee, investigate the numerous resources available of relevance for this option, and start implementing the ideas they learn about. At the same time, I would hope that those taking this option would recognize that reaching, and crossing, a tipping point is inevitable within a few decades, and that they take that fact into consideration as they make their plans.

### 4.c. Move to an Existing Eco-Community

Given that there *are* numerous intentional communities “out there” (as the links I provided earlier indicate), some of them being also eco-communities, opportunities exist for taking this option. However, because moving to a different location—and living with people who one doesn’t know, and in close proximity at that—is a decision that would be difficult for most people to take (it would take them out of their “comfort zone”), few are likely to take advantage of it.

### 4.d. Create, With a Few Others, an Eco-Community, and Then Move to It

A great idea, but (a) few have the financial resources to do it; (b) if one would like to take this option, one may not be able to find others to join one in the venture; (c) moving from one’s existing location is always a difficult decision to make; and (d) we moderns lack the diversity of skills that would enable many of us to take this option. I should add, though, that what I am suggesting here is the creation of, e.g., modern “[Brook Farms](#)”! (The United States has an interesting—and important—communal past; the literature on this subject is extensive, including the excellent [America’s Communal Utopias](#), 1997, edited by Donald E. Pitzer. By the way, [Wisconsin](#) also has had its “utopians.”)

### 4.e. Move to a Rural Location and Begin to Homestead

For some, this is an attractive option, and there is an abundance of resources—such as [this](#) and [this](#)—to provide one with the necessary skills to make taking this option a success.

#### D.5. Accomplish Suicide

I certainly would not advocate one taking this option, but believe that as living situations begin to deteriorate, many will.

### Conclusions

To answer the question posed by my title—“Can We Beat Global Warming”? “Almost certainly **No!**” Which means that insofar as we have *any* options, engaging in efforts to *adapt* to the changes that will inevitably be occurring would seem to be our only viable course of action. And to answer the question asked on p. 11 above: *What can we humans do to “falsify”—to some degree at least—the “picture” that I have painted in the scenario that I presented above?* Nothing! All we can do is try to *adapt*.

It seems highly likely that we will be crossing a critical tipping point within a few decades (if we haven’t already done so!), and *that* strong probability means that *the only* choice we have now is that of trying to adapt to the changes that will be occurring. This can take the form of homesteading or (preferably) living in eco-communities. Even the adaptation option, however, has the problem that it offers *no guarantees*—for global warming is likely to severely decimate the world’s population. We must not, however, let this possibility deter us from action.

The choices before us are twofold:

**We can either wait for others to act on our behalf (so far as global warming is concerned) or, rather, we can *ourselves* take action.**

It is my conviction that the first course would be a foolish one to take—because our “leaders” are so in name only: On the one hand, they seem principally to be at the “beck and call” of fossil fuel interests, and for that reason are not likely to act—until it’s too late. In addition, one wonders if many of them are even *aware* of the severity of the problem that global warming poses.

Insofar as there *is* a best answer—and there *is* none, in my opinion! (**because it’s likely that global warming will wipe out most of the world’s population within a matter of decades**)—it is moving in an eco-communitarian direction<sup>14</sup> (as discussed above). Indeed, in 1984 (!) I published a 5-“wave” strategy/scenario of societal system change in an eco-communitarian

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<sup>14</sup> Given that my Ph. D. is in Urban Economic Geography (University of Cincinnati, 1970), it is perhaps not surprising that the solution that I recommend is a *geographical* one!

direction,<sup>15</sup> and have often wondered what our society would be like today had that strategy/scenario been implemented, beginning in 1984.

*That* solution has two principal problems, however:

- It will get underway *only* if some private organizations and/or wealthy individuals provide the necessary funding.
- Even if it is implemented, and “takes off” (which itself is not likely, given people’s resistance to moving physically), it is likely to result in the “salvation” of just a fraction of the world’s population.

These are both serious problems. My hope, however, is that they will not discourage potential leaders so much that they don’t even *try* to save as many people as possible.

It is often said that our species is the most intelligent of all species. Isn’t it about time for us to demonstrate at least *some* modicum of intelligence?!

Given that today (March 29, 2013) is Good Friday, the following verses from [Luke](#) 23:28 – 30, might be appropriate in closing:

“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me [Jesus]; weep for yourselves and for your children.  
<sup>29</sup> For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ <sup>30</sup> Then

“‘they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!”  
and to the hills, “Cover us!””

Not a very pretty picture, true, but one likely with a great deal of realism.

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<sup>15</sup> [“Ecotopia: A ‘Gerendipitous’ Scenario.](#)

## **Our Obsolete Survival Instinct**

Alton C. Thompson

If it is true that “our society was not designed for people” ([Philip E. Slater](#), [The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point](#), 1970, p. 92), the converse is also true: *Humans* per se are not *instinctually* “designed” for existence in the modern world. Which fact poses a problem for our continued survival as a species.

Most, if not all, of the instincts that developed in our ancestors resulted from *selective survival*;<sup>[1]</sup> that is, those individuals having a genetic proclivity to behave in a certain way in a given (threatening often) situation *survived* (and then later produced progeny with the same genetic proclivity), and those lacking such a genetic proclivity perished (leaving no progeny).

The “situation” referred to here was commonly one in which a predator was threatening, with the behavioral response being a quick “decision” to fight the predator, flee from the situation—or “freeze;” and the *behavioral* response was accompanied by a *physiological* response. That is, a threat was “recognized” by the body, and physiological responses were set in motion which then “prepared” one for whatever *behavioral* response the body “decided” was appropriate.

Survival instincts do not *all* relate to “deciding” what to do when threatened by a predator, however. For example, we apparently have an instinctual aversion to substances that have a [bitter taste](#)—evidently because bitterness is often (but not always) associated with toxicity.

Still another example of a survival instinct was exemplified several years ago by a [Japanese man](#) who was able to survive in cold weather without food or water for 24 days by falling into a state of “hibernation.” “He fell into a hypothermic state at a very early stage, which is similar to hibernation,” said Dr Shinichi Sato, who treated Mr. Uchikoshi. Thus, Mr. Uchikoshi’s body evidently “decided” that he should continue to live, and put the body into a state that enabled his survival for an extraordinarily long period of time.

We moderns continue to have the various instincts—survival and otherwise—that were acquired by our ancient ancestors, and those instincts continue to be useful to us. However, the circumstances of modern life are very different from that earlier situation; and the instincts developed back then are not “designed” to help us with *all* of the contingencies that we encounter today. For example, they do help us cope with the problem of *global warming*—not surprising given that our instincts were primarily developed to help us cope in the *immediate present* (the 24-day survival of Mr. Uchikoshi stretching the meaning of “immediate present,” however).



The *fact* that our instincts—which have played such an important role in our survival in the past—have no relevance for the primary threat to our existence *today*, is of extreme importance because it implies that we now lack a vital “tool” that might be very useful to us. We *do* have a *substitute* for that tool—our brains—with their capacity for rational thought; but that *tool* is a poor substitute for instincts.

Consider the problems that we face in addressing the threat posed by global warming:

- Many in our society seem to be oblivious to the threat.
- Many of those who are *aware* of the threat, lack awareness of the *seriousness* of the threat. For example, recently I renewed contact with a man who had been a science teacher at the secondary level, and was surprised by the fact that although he was aware of the global warming threat, he downplayed its seriousness.
- Some are aware of the threat, and also aware of its seriousness, but assume that this is a problem that only our *leaders* are capable of addressing. They may feel some uneasiness regarding our leaders’ “dawdling” relative to this problem, but because they perceive the problem as having a *technical* answer, and therefore “out of their hands,” if they are motivated to do *anything* about the problem it is limited to writing letters or sending emails to their representatives in Congress or participating in demonstrations, etc.
- A few recognize that it is now too late to halt further warming, and realize that a tipping point will be crossed soon (if it hasn’t occurred already), so that our only choice now is to try to adapt to the changes that will be occurring. However, because adaptation would require *moving* to a different location, they resist doing what they *know* they should be doing because leaving their “comfort zone” represents an extremely difficult decision that they “fight” making.
- Finally, there are those who recognize the problem, recognize that the only option we have now is that of adaptation, would like to engage in adaptive activities—but lack the resources for doing so. That is, they lack the money to purchase land, don’t know like-minded others with whom they might form an eco-community, lack the skills that they would need for a new way of life, etc.

What these problems suggest is that once the tipping point is reached and crossed, and change in atmospheric conditions begins to accelerate, few—if any—will survive. This possibility is unfortunate, but I see no alternative to it.

## Endnote

1. Note here that I avoided use of the term “natural selection”—a term popular in glib explanations. “Natural selection,” as defined by Charles Darwin, was that selection that resulted from intra-specific competition induced by “excess” births. Although the term “natural selection” is often used in discussions of human evolution, it likely played no role whatsoever in human evolution, the relevant factors being especially (a) environmental change, (b) predation (given that our ancestors were a prey species), and (b) (female-choice) sexual selection. The “selective survival” referred to above involved predators (e.g., the “[fight or flight](#)” response first discussed by [Walter B. Cannon](#)), but not *just* predators.

The term “natural selection” is typically used by individuals when they lack knowledge of the mechanism(s) involved in bringing about change, and use the term to hide that fact—hoping that the reader will not recognize the vacuity of their presentations.

## **Coping With Future Events**

Alton C. Thompson

[Wilson Knut](#), in [reviewing](#) Chris Hedges's [Empire of Illusion: The End of Literacy and the Triumph of Spectacle](#) (2009), notes that:

Hedges argues that we have become a polytheistic society worshiping celebrities, athletes, and charismatic politicians and preachers, because they represent what we wish to be. We no longer want to deal with the complexities of reality. We don't want to have to think too hard about complex issues. We want to live in the fantasy world of celebrities, reality TV, and sports. We want to be lied to, because the lie makes us feel so much better about our lives. We have created a culture of illusion.

In his effort to *generalize* about American society, I will have to admit that Hedges is “on target”—just as [Philip E. Slater](#) was for a somewhat earlier generation. As Hedges notes, too many in this society have:

- Become occupied with entertainment, diversions, such as watching television programs and attending sporting events.
- Fixated on celebrities—people who (as [C. Wright Mills](#) once put it) are “[celebrated because they are celebrated](#)”!—whether those celebrities are movie or television “stars,” pop singers, athletes, or preachers, etc.
- Basically given up on hard thinking.

I'm not sure that I agree with the assertion that “we want to be lied to,” but the fact of the matter is that we *are* continually. Being one who gets his “news and views” primarily from various internet web sites, I find that I can hardly tolerate watching the “national news” on any of the major television networks—not so much because their “anchors” convey outright lies, as because they tend to read half-truths that mislead the viewer. This is, of course, a *form* of lying, but not the type that would lead to prosecutions.

Not only do the mass media of this country *mislead* the viewer/reader, they *divert* one's attention from what's important. These facts, along with the fact that the television viewer is constantly bombarded with advertisements (the *newspaper* reader can avoid looking at advertisements), have had the consequence that the average American's brain has been turned into mush!

Given this pathetic situation, there is no point in trying to gain a large audience, in this country, for any hard facts regarding, e.g., global warming: One would be neither heard, nor listened to. However, *that* fact should not cause one to turn one's attention away from the typical American: The typical American deserves *pity* rather than *contempt*—and the same is true for our “heroes” and “models,” such as Donald Trump. Yes! I mean that! It is easy to harbor feelings of contempt for the likes of Donald Trump, but one must remember that he is merely a *product* of this society. *He* may think of himself as a self-made man, but the truth of the matter is that he has allowed our society to mold him into what he is, and likely doesn't have the intelligence to realize that fact. Even “allowed” misrepresents the facts here, for no *conscious choice* was involved in “the Donald's” development.

The typical American—along with their “models,” such as Donald Trump—may not *realize* that the world is on a “fast track” to disaster within a few decades, as global warming unleashes its powerful forces; but that fact does not excuse those of us who *do* realize this from dismissing the typical American as unworthy of any help once those forces *are* unleashed.

What needs to be done, rather, is, first, to realize that it would be pointless to look to our “leaders” to “lead us out of the wilderness”—by either working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, or by expanding “carbon sinks” (on the latter, among other things, see this [fine article](#) by an acquaintance of mine, Rick Chamberlin): They can be expected to continue to ignore the problem—perhaps giving lip service to it from time to time, but *doing* nothing of consequence about it.

Given their abdication from providing any sort of leadership, those of us aware of the dangers that lie ahead are left little option than to resign ourselves to the virtual certainty that a critical tipping point will soon be reached and crossed, after which climate change will become rapid. What *that* means is that not only will the global mean temperature begin to increase sharply, but storms will become increasingly frequent—and increasingly severe—and weather conditions will become ever more erratic.

What *those* changes imply is that living will become increasingly difficult, especially after societies begin to collapse—as they are likely to do. It is difficult for most of us to imagine how our society will be in 30 or 40 years, but the logic of climate change is likely to mean that by that point in time there will be:

- No retail stores open.
- No school/university system.
- No religious organizations.

- No functioning governments.
- No medical facilities operating.
- Etc.

Given such a prospect, it should be obvious that unless one has made an effort to become as self-sufficient—or “community-sufficient,” in the case of those who have chosen the eco-communitarian option—as possible, the likelihood of one’s continued survival will approach zero.

What *I* have been advocating on these pages is working to create an eco-communitarian movement—the communities involved in that movement being (a) small initially (perhaps fewer than 100 in the beginning), (b) designed to be as self-sufficient as possible (regarding food in particular), (c) otherwise designed with global warming in mind, and (d) designed with “human design specifications” in mind (see Chapters 2 – 4 of my [eBook](#)).

Those who form the initial vanguard of this movement will, of course, be those who are “in the know” about global warming—and in agreement regarding the four points listed above. But as the movement begins to “take off,” its members should begin to (a) try to *publicize* their efforts—*what* they are doing, and *why*; and (b) offer to help others follow their lead.

Why “offer to help others follow their lead”? Two reasons, actually. In the first place, members of the vanguard need to recognize that the attitudes and views of the typical American are ones not of their *own choosing* but, rather, are ones that have been (virtually) societally-imposed. A constant temptation is for us to “blame the victim,” but one with a generous spirit will recognize that the typical American is best perceived as a *victim*—someone who has merely been trying to be a “good American.”

Secondly, as the society is in a process of collapse, many people will be facing desperate conditions, and are likely to turn to violent actions in an effort to survive. Given that members of the vanguard will then be in danger, they have a self-interest in trying to minimize the number of desperate people.

At some point it will become apparent to many—even the typical American, and “models” such as Donald Trump—that this movement for societal system change is the only path to (possible) salvation, and when that point is reached, the movement will expand rapidly. But only if it (a) gets underway soon enough (e.g., THIS YEAR!), and (b) develops to a point, within the next decade, that it *will* be able to absorb many in the “typical American” group.

Predictions, on the part of some climate scientists, that global warming is likely to wipe out most of the world's population may very well come true. I am convinced, however, that if the two points in the previous paragraph are realized, the severity of that culling will be reduced.

## That “Sinking” Feeling

Alton C. Thompson

Under a heading which he named “Sink or swim,” blogger Rick Chamberlin [states](#):

Like hope, the climate crisis is not as simple as it sometimes seems. The greenhouse gases we spew into the atmosphere through our smokestacks and tailpipes get most of the attention, but scientists have been telling us all along that emissions are only part of the story. Just as important is how human activity has altered the oceans, forests and grasslands which have, for millions of years before the Industrial Revolution, pulled carbon from the atmosphere in sufficient amounts to keep our climate moderate, enabling humanity to evolve, flourish and, well, alter that climate. In short, it’s about [sinks](#) as well as spigots. In a forest, most of the carbon is sequestered above the ground in trees. Increasingly in our warming world, those trees burn and rapidly release their carbon stores back into the atmosphere. But in grasslands, most carbon is pumped by grasses and [forbs](#) back into the ground where fire can’t touch it. There it tends to stay, in the roots, rhizomes and soil... unless the land is tilled up...

Rick makes a good point here—one that I have given very little attention to in my many essays on this site relative to global warming: The warming that has been occurring since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution (c1750 CE) has resulted primarily from human activities—but *two* sorts of activities, not just *one*.

The activity that *I* have been emphasizing in my essays is that of *emissions*—the fact that our burning of fossil fuels has resulted in an increased concentration of “greenhouse” gases in the lower atmosphere. The point—and it’s a correct one—that Rick makes is that a *second* human activity has *also* been a contributing factor—actions which have resulted in the destruction, or reduced effectiveness, of “carbon sinks.”

The question that arises now, then, is: Given that *both* of these human activities have contributed to the problem of global warming, what sort(s) of *remedial action* on our part is needed?

Seemingly, this question has an obvious answer:

- Decrease emissions of greenhouse gases; **and**
- Halt those activities that degrade or eliminate carbon sinks.

Now Rick is right to note that, “Like hope, the climate crisis is not as simple as it sometimes seems.” Note, however, that Rick’s focus is on *why* we are faced with a “climate crisis” rather than what we should *do* about that crisis. More accurately, Rick tacitly assumes (seemingly) that

(a) if we identify the “levers” that cause global warming, and then (b) pull those levers in the right way, the problem will go away.

Rick realizes that there is little that *he* can do to cause emissions to decrease substantially, but *does* see opportunities for addressing the carbon sink problem, and *is* pursuing those opportunities—to his credit.

A major fact is missing from his thinking, however: The fact that we are near a critical tipping point relative to global warming (and, possibly, have *already* crossed it!), and this means that:

- Warming will accelerate, the number of storms will increase, their severity will increase, and weather conditions will become increasingly erratic.
- Those changes will eventually cause our society to collapse, with an extremely severe culling of our—the world’s, in fact—population.

If we could have confidence in our leaders—that they would engage in actions to ensure that disaster does not occur, or is not as severe as it otherwise might be—there would be very little need to worry, and to engage in *individual* actions to address the problem.

But only a fool would have confidence in our “leaders.” *Because* of that fact, if one wishes to increase one’s chance of survival, one will need to recognize that *only adaptive measures* will increase one’s probability of survival—such as starting to homestead or moving to an eco-community (whether pre-existing, of one that one creates with some like-minded others).

What Rick needs to understand is that unless he engages in activities designed to improve *his own* chances of survival, he will not be able to *continue* his efforts of a “sink” nature. Perhaps he *is* engaging in such activities, but his essay gives one no *indication* that he is.

Rick needs to get his priorities straight: His first priority must be *his own* survival, for if he is “done in” by global warming—because he has not *prepared* properly for it—his “sink” activities will cease with his death. If, however, he *does* prepare for the ravages that global warming will be inflicting on us, he *may* be able to continue those “sink” activities for a long time.

I get a “sinking feeling” when I consider the possibility that Rick does *not* recognize this.



## **How to Listen to Scientists**

Alton C. Thompson

The findings of this report could inform “design values,” or precipitation amounts, used by water resource managers, insurance and building sectors in modeling the risk due to catastrophic precipitation amounts. Engineers use design values to determine the design of water impoundments and runoff control structures, such as dams, culverts, and detention ponds.

The report in question—“[New study: A warming world will further intensify extreme precipitation events](#)”—was done for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and had as its major conclusion that with continued global warming, “extreme precipitation events” will become increasingly common.

What I wish to call attention to regarding the report, however, is not so much its *findings* as the *assumptions* seemingly associated with those findings:

- Global warming *will* continue: No efforts will be made either to (a) reduce greenhouse gas emissions, to (b) expand carbon “sinks,” or to (c) engage in geo-engineering measures in an effort to reduce the impact of emissions.
- Given that global warming will continue, our only option is to *adapt* to the changes that global warming will bring—such as “extreme precipitation events.”
- The adaptational actions in question should be engaged in by various *professionals*—such as resource managers, those in the insurance and building sectors, and engineers—rather than (a) governmental agencies or (b) members of the general public. The implications of *this* fact are that:
  - Governmental units not only *will* do nothing to help individuals and firms engage in adaptational behaviors, but *need* not do so.
  - Individuals, acting as *individuals*, need not engage in adaptational behaviors.
- The professionals in question *can* be expected to engage in activities such as those identified (i.e., the ones they *should* engage in).
- Those activities will suffice to address the problem of an increase in “extreme precipitation events.”

The authors of the report may not have *intended* their report to “say” the above points, but all of them (and perhaps more!) are *implicit* in the above-quoted statement.

What the above-quoted statement illustrates well is the *compartmentalization* that characterizes the thinking of many, if not most, scientists. Each tends to work within the confines of a certain “box,” and is either *unable*, or *unwilling*, to move beyond the boundaries of the box in question. Scientists tend to be very much conscious of what they are, and are not, *expert* about, and are understandably reluctant to make comments regarding that which they lack expertise. In being so reluctant, however, scientists may make misleading remarks—as my “interpretative” comments above suggest.

In addition, scientists tend to be so *embedded* intellectually in the societies of which they are members that in making recommendations they are simply unable even to *conceive* recommendations that would in effect, or actually, *question* the existing societal structure—in that they suggest *societal system change* as a solution to the problems that they are researching.

Because of this latter inability on the part of most scientists, their recommendations must be taken with the proverbial “grain of salt.” My assertion here may have lacked relevance in the past, but at present it is *very* relevant, for:

- The continued “progress” of global warming—admitted, at least tacitly, in the above-quoted statement—is likely to cause our society (and others) to collapse within a few decades, with massive deaths both preceding, and following, that collapse.
- Given that we humans—with the exception of some scientists, apparently!—can *anticipate* this catastrophe, and given that we are an *intelligent* species (oh?!), it follows that we should, at present, be developing, and beginning to implement, a strategy for *trying* to survive the calamity that lies in store for us within a matter of decades.

What that strategy must focus on is developing a *new way to live*—which, from a societal standpoint, means developing a *new societal system*.

What the above-quoted statement “tells” us is that we should look to climate scientists for projections regarding future atmospheric conditions, but *ignore* the recommendations that they make—for such recommendations tend to be seriously biased by scientists’ “embeddedness” in their society’s Existing Order.

## [Continuing the Updating](#)

Alton C. Thompson

Economist-turned-sociologist [Edward Alsworth Ross](#) [1866 – 1951], writing in 1907, noted that the society of his rural youth (in Illinois, Kansas, and Iowa) was giving way to a more urban-industrialized society with a more “webbed social life.”[1] That is, there was growing *interdependence* between people. He noted, for example that (p. 3):

My own eyes and nose and judgment defer to the inspector of food, or drugs, or gas, or factories, or tenements, or insurance companies. I rely upon others to look after my drains, invest my savings, nurse my sick, and teach my children.

Whereas most economists have viewed this increasing “mutualism” (as Ross referred to it, p. 4) in a *positive* light (e.g., increased efficiency/productivity), Ross observed that (pp. 3 – 4) “this spread-out manner of life lays snares for the weak and opens doors to the wicked.

Interdependence puts us, as it were, at one another’s mercy, and so ushers in a multitude of new forms of wrongdoing.” “Every added relation among men,” he added (p. 69), “makes new chances for the sons of [Belial](#). Wider interdependencies breed new treacheries. Fresh opportunities for illicit gain are continually appearing, and these are eagerly seized by the unscrupulous.” “Most sin is preying [i.e., exploitation],” he declared (p. 4), “and every new social relation begets its cannibalism.”

Ross insisted on using the term “sin” for the wrongdoing that he perceived, defining “sin” as (p. 90) “conduct that harms another.” His use of that term might seem surprising for an academic—he was at the University of Wisconsin when he wrote *Sin and Society*—but (a) he had been exposed to daily Bible reading as a child, thus had been imbued with the Christian notion of sin; (b) he lived at a time when active involvement in the society was more common with academics than it is now; (c) and he took advantage of that fact (and became a “success on the lecture circuit,” and was an “essayist, social critic, and commentator to the nation at large,” while “still maintaining his post as sociologist-in-residence at the University of Wisconsin”). [2]

What distinguishes Ross’s book on (modern) sins from a work by a *religious* writer is that Ross perceived that the principal sins were now occurring in the *economy* (p. 7):

- “The man who picks pockets with a railway rebate”
- Murders “with an adulterant instead of a bludgeon”
- Burglarizes “with a ‘rake-off’ instead of a jimmy”

- Cheats “with a company prospectus instead of a deck of cards”
- Scuttles “his town instead of his ship”

In Economics, and in the popular mind, the “captain of industry” (p. 35) was a hero; but to Ross—as to [Thorstein Veblen](#) [1857 – 1929] before him [3]—the “captain” was the source of the problem.

Ross was correct in arguing that growing interdependence *enabled* exploitation, but could have added that other factors were also at play in causing “preying”:

- The fact that individuals differ in their values, interests, personalities, knowledge, intelligence, creativity, etc.
- Ideas developed by [Martin Luther](#) [1483 – 1546] and [John Calvin](#) [1509 – 1535] much earlier. Consider [this](#):

Like the word itself, the idea of a calling is new; it is a product of the Reformation. Its newness comes in giving *worldly* activity a religious significance. People have a duty to fulfill the obligations imposed upon them by their position in the world. Martin Luther developed this idea; each legitimate calling has the same worth to God. This "moral justification of worldly activity" was one of the most important contributions of the Reformation, and particularly of Luther's role in it.

And also [this](#):

there is, especially in the later Puritans, the idea of success in one's calling as a visible sign of being a member of the elect. The success is striven for, of course, not to *prove* that one is a member of the elect destined to be saved but, assuming that one is in the elect by virtue of one's Calvinist faith, to strive to labor and succeed for the glory of God. A Calvinist emphasis on postponement of earthly gratification led to a particular stress on saving. Labor or "industry" and thrift, almost for their own sake, or rather for God's sake, were emphasized in Calvinism much more than in the other segments of Christianity.

That is, the religious views that Ross's fellow Americans were being exposed to by their clergy—e.g., the notion of a “calling”—encouraged people to attend to their personal economic affairs rather than “doing” for others.

- Like most clergy everywhere and at all times, the clergy of Ross's day were more “in tune” with the Bible (and church doctrine) than with what was occurring in their society—and in that respect were—ironically!—very *unlike* the personages in the Bible; as a consequence, most were simply *unable* to detect the “sins” that were developing in their society.

- Economic theory was now condoning selfish behavior. [Adam Smith](#), in his [The Wealth of Nations](#) (1776), introduced the concept of an “[invisible hand](#)”—asserting thereby that if each individual pursues his/her private interests, the public good will be realized, this ensured by “the market,” so long as “market forces” are not interfered with by government. With this new “theory,” everyone—*Christians included*—now had “substantial” theoretical support (ostensibly, at any rate) for engaging in self-interested behavior with a clear conscience.[4]

One of Ross’s principal points was that although new sins were developing, the public failed to *recognize* this fact. For example, as Weinberg states in his Introduction (pp. xx – xxi):

Unfortunately, Ross explained, the public is rarely able to identify the true enemies of society or to gauge the full extent of the harm these men inflict on the nation. Committed to an outmoded moral code, laymen tend to assess wrongdoers on the basis of traditional, yet highly irrelevant[,] criteria: on the wickedness of their characters and degree of violence they employ; their social manners and their educational level, and their standing in the community.

And as Ross himself said (p. 14):

Among the chiefest sinners are now enrolled men who are pure and kind-hearted, loving in their families, faithful to their friends, and generous to the needy.

And (p. 34):

The public, being leaden of imagination, is moved only by the concrete. It heeds the crass physical act, but overlooks the subtle iniquities that pulse along those viewless filaments of interrelationship that bind us together.

And:

How often clean linen and church-going are accepted as substitutes for right-doing! What a deodorizer is polite society! Who smells the buzzard under his stolen peacock plumes! Any one can sense turpitude in the dingy ‘hobo,’ but a well-groomed Captain Kidd, of correct habits, with a family ‘reared in the lap of luxury’ as a background, is well-nigh irresistible.

He went on to declare that (p. 40) “We need an annual supplement to the [Decalogue](#) [i.e., the Ten Commandments].” But:

- Who would *be in charge* of creating this “annual supplement”?
- Who would *promulgate* these newly-minted commandments?

Ross provides us with no answers, but seemingly implies that *were* such an annual supplement to be created, members of the *clergy* would not be the ones promulgating them!—for “operationalizing” the new commands would require *imagination*, something that members of the clergy lack. He adds (p 41):

It takes imagination to see that bogus medical diploma, lying advertisement, and fake testimonial are death-dealing instruments. It takes imagination to see that savings-bank wrecker, loan shark, and investment swindler, in taking livelihoods take lives. It takes imagination to see that the business of debauching voters, fixing juries, seducing law-makers, and corrupting public servants is like sawing through the props of a crowded grand-stand.

Although Ross's book is a disappointment from an "answers" standpoint, his point that there is a serious lag between societal developments and moral thinking is an extremely important one—and one that is still very much with us. Dave Lindorff, e.g., recently reminded us that this past week (today is April 19, 2013) there were [two acts of terror](#) (at the Boston Marathon, and West, Texas), but "only one investigation." Why? In the first case the perpetrators were readily identifiable (because of cameras that had been recording activities in and around the event), whereas in the second case, although the villains in the West Fertilizer Co. explosion were clearly the managers and owners of the plant (as Lindorff notes), the public—and our legal system—finds it difficult to place the blame for that explosion on those individuals: The *connection* between perpetrator and explosion is harder for most to fathom than in the case where (as with the recent "Boston Massacre") certain individuals actually *detonated* the explosives.

Ross makes the point (p. 56) that "Sometimes it is *time* instead of *space* that divides him [i.e., the perpetrator] from his victims"—which statement called to mind *global warming*, as I read it. For although global warming is beginning to show its ugly head, the devastation associated with it will become much more prominent in the future—i.e., within a few decades. And the *causation* in this case is even *less* concrete than the two cases discussed above, because it is our *way of life*—whose dependence on fossil fuels is causing a build-up of "greenhouse gases" in the atmosphere, thereby pushing Earth System to a "tipping point" which, once crossed, will decimate the human population—and perhaps even result in our extinction.

"[Thou shalt not kill](#)" is a fundamental moral principle associated with both Judaism and Christianity (among other religions). Therefore, one would think that religious leaders would be (a) aware of the fact that global warming is *occurring*, is (b) killing people *now*, and (c) is likely to kill *massive* numbers of people within the next few decades.

One would think that religious leader would not only be *aware* of the threat posed by global warming, but would be asking what could be done to at least *minimize* the culling that is likely to be occurring. Evidently, however, their moral thinking is not "in tune" with the times, so that rather than alerting their congregants to the dangers that lie ahead, and encouraging them to think seriously about how to address those dangers, they blather on about the current lectionary reading.

The clergy *could* be playing a significant role in “saving” our species—or at least a significant portion of it—from extinction. They need to update their concept of “salvation”—but will they? I have serious doubts about this—and that is truly a tragedy!

## Endnotes

1. [\*Sin and Society: An Analysis of Latter-Day Iniquity\*](#). New York: Harper & Row, Publishers. 1973, p. 6. With a letter from President [Theodore Roosevelt](#), and Introduction (pp. vii – xxxiii) to this Torchbook Edition by Julius Weinberg.
2. Weinberg, pp. xxx – xxxi in his Introduction.
3. Veblen had used the term in his 1904 [\*The Theory of Business Enterprise\*](#) (p. 30).
4. Jerry Z. Muller, e.g., has pointed out that Smith was “over-interpreted” regarding this. [\*Adam Smith in His Time and Ours: Designing the Decent Society\*](#). New York: The Free Press, 1993.

## **The Day After the Day After**

Alton C. Thompson

Writer John Atcheson recently [stated](#) the following:

The gravest threat our species has ever faced is hurtling toward us like a slow motion nuclear holocaust, and we are focusing on things like immigration, gay marriage, and the Defense budget.

We are long past the time when paying homage [on Earth Day] to our one and only home, our refuge from oblivion, for a single day each year makes any sense whatsoever.

This is a failure of leadership unrivalled in modern times. This makes Neville Chamberlain's "peace in our time" look like saber rattling. Never have so many ignored so much, and consigned so many to flood, fire, poverty, pestilence, famine and death.

What we need is a massive effort that makes cutting greenhouse gas emissions the obsessive objective of all we do.

But that won't come from celebrating the Earth one day a year. And it won't come from leaders who are led by the political whims of the moment.

Atcheson is "on the mark" in asserting that:

- Global warming is the "gravest threat our species has ever faced . . . ."
- Our failure to respond to this threat "is a failure of leadership unrivalled in modern times."

But do "we need . . . a massive effort that makes cutting greenhouse gas emissions the obsessive objective of all [that] we do"? Atcheson implies that our current leaders—in the political and business realms—are too occupied with "the political whims of the moment" to respond to this threat. But these two statements by Atcheson suggest to me two questions:

- *Were* there to be a "massive effort" to cut greenhouse gas emissions, would that "fix" the problem that we face with global warming?
- If our political and business leaders cannot be expected to provide any meaningful leadership relative to this problem, what, then, are we to do?



Atcheson seems to believe that if the “massive effort” he refers to were actually to occur, the problem of global warming would go away. But given my recent discussion of “climate change commitment” and “tipping point” (see Section 5 in [this eBook](#)), it should be clear that even if humans—throughout the world—*were* to stop emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere *tomorrow*, it’s in the realm of possibility that we would reach, and cross, the “tipping point” regarding “climate change.” But this won’t happen, of course, thereby making it virtually inevitable that the tipping point *will* be crossed—and that “climate change” (in its various “dimensions”) will then accelerate.

If Atcheson is wrong about the *possibility* that the tipping point will not be crossed, he does, though, realize that our leaders will continue their “dithering.” But what is his answer to that high probability? ***He offers none!***

I recently sent an email to [Grist](#) in response to Atcheson’s “Could novels about climate change shake us to our senses?,” pointing out that I had recently had an [essay](#) related to his article posted on this site, and asking them pass my message along to Atcheson. If they do, and if Atcheson then contacts me, I will send him the Appendix to my article (to which a link is provided above), so that he can get the perspective of another person on this matter.

People such as Atcheson—who has a fairly high readership, I assume—need to develop a more complete perspective on the problem of global warming. Perhaps then he will begin offering his readers some ideas that they can act on—rather than simply misleading them, and “leaving them hanging.”

## Two Epigrammic Criticisms of Christianity

Alton C. Thompson

An “epigram” is a “witty form of expression,” and at least two such epigrams exist—as *criticisms*—relative to Christianity. My goal here, then, is not so much to present a detailed—and “priestly” [1]—critique of Christianity as to comment on two epigrammic criticisms of Christianity:

- The religion *of* Jesus became, with Christianity, (merely) a religion *about* Jesus.
- Christianity conquered the world, and in the process the world conquered Christianity.

### **A Religion About Jesus [2]**

The phrase—the religion *of* Jesus became a religion that was merely *about* Jesus—evidently goes back at least to Rollin Lynde Hartt, [\*The Man Himself: The Nazarene\*](#) (1923), but the *concept itself* goes back even earlier—e.g., to Thomas Jefferson and Joseph Priestley, and perhaps even still earlier writers.

What this statement implies (given its assertion that Christianity became a religion that was merely *about* Jesus) is that the religion practiced by Jesus, in contrast to the new religion (of “Christianity”), in becoming a religion that focused on *beliefs* (i.e., “aboutness”), thereby shed whatever previous orientation to values and behavior that it had. That is, the distinction implied in this first statement is that between *orthodoxy* (i.e., correct—or “right”—*belief*) and *orthopraxy* (i.e., correct *practice*, especially in terms of *behavior*, with “behavior” here understood as referring not to *ritual* behavior but, rather, to how one relates to others—other *human beings*, in particular).

Note that this first statement makes no claim that Jesus *founded* a new religion. Rather, it implicitly recognizes that Jesus was raised in an area in which the Jewish religion (as it existed 2000 years ago) was dominant, but that Jesus had some problems with the Judaism of his time—so that the religion that *he* practiced, although *rooted* in the Judaism of his time, was not *identical* to the “orthodox” Judaism of his time. But although the above statement (that Christianity is merely *about* Jesus) makes no claim that Jesus *founded* a religion, it *does* assert that (a) a religion (or even *collection* of religions) developed that *claimed* to have been inspired by Jesus’s “ministry,” but (b) that religion did *not*, in fact, *continue* the religion of Jesus. What it did, rather, was simply to promote a certain set of *beliefs* regarding Jesus—beliefs which (a)

adherents of that religion were expected to accept as “true,” (b) with acceptance of those beliefs as “true” being the “heart” of the religion.

Note also that the name given to the new religion was not “Jesuanism” but, rather, “Christianity.” This *in itself* suggests that the new religion did not *continue* the religion of Jesus, for “[Christ](#)” is a *title* given to Jesus: It is a *Greek* title, with the meaning “anointed”: It’s true that “for centuries the Jews had used the term ‘the Anointed’ to refer to their expected deliverer”—to which they gave the name “[Messiah](#)”: “The [Jewish messiah](#) is a leader anointed by God, physically descended from the [Davidic line](#), who will rule the [united tribes of Israel](#) and herald the [Messianic Age](#) of global peace also known as the [World to Come](#).”

But use of the term “Christianity” for the new religion (rather than, e.g., “Jesuanism”) implies that what the new religion found of interest about Jesus was *not* whatever *teaching* he engaged in but, rather, the “fact” that he was the *Messiah*. In fact, the new religion claimed that Jesus *thought of himself* as the Messiah, and in its Scripture has Peter declare ([Luke 9:20](#)) that Jesus is God’s Christ, and in [Matthew 16:16](#) has Peter declare that Jesus is the “‘Messiah, the Son of the living God.’” Thus, the very word “Christianity” suggests that the new religion focused on the “*whatness*” of Jesus to the exclusion of his teachings. In other words, choice of the name “Christianity” for the new religion implies that it *had no intention of continuing* the religion of Jesus! (The *degree* to which Christianity continued the teachings attributed to Jesus is a matter beyond the scope—or even interest!—of this essay.)

By implication, the first statement asserts that the behaviors enjoined and promoted by Jesus were either *ignored entirely* by the religion that developed in Jesus’s name, or were *downplayed* in favor of a system of *beliefs*. Although the statement makes no references to *ritual* behaviors being associated with the new religion, the fact of the matter is that rituals *were* developed for the adherents of the new religion to engage in (under the leadership of priests), those rituals pertaining to (alleged) events in the life of Jesus (i.e., birth, baptism, death, resurrection, ascension). This development of rituals is not surprising given (a) the new religion’s orientation to “factual” events in Jesus’s life and (b) the fact that having rituals would help priests *divert* the attention of the religion’s adherents away from Jesus’s teachings (!)—and, in addition, help make the new religion attractive to “[pagans](#)” because of its similarity to the religions practiced by them. [3]

## The World Conquered Christianity

[Robert Adamson](#) [1852 – 1902], in his “Moral Theory and Moral Practice” (1900) [4] noted (pp. 229 - 230):

the remarkable discrepancy between the Christian code of morals and the actual practice of Christian communities. The discrepancy can hardly be denied, but it may be explained by insisting that the Christian teaching relates primarily to the formation of character; that it

inculcates dispositions from which, if due opportunity be furnished, the duly conforming type of action would follow. It need hardly be pointed out how wide a field this explanation, if accepted, would yield for that most common weakness of human nature, self-deception. **To suppose it possible that a human character can be moulded into the Christian dispositions and excellences of character, while it develops in and among institutions of life admittedly not framed upon the Christian model or adjusted to it, is to put at defiance all that we know of the interdependence of character and circumstance. Dispositions, and the objective counterparts of them, acknowledged modes of life, must always go together, and neither can be understood in separation from the other.**

[I have added the **bolding** to this paragraph.]

That is, if one observes Christians in the real world, one may be struck by the discrepancy that one can observe between the behavioral principles that they *claim* to follow and the behaviors that they *actually* engage in. But one should not be surprised by the existence of this discrepancy, for (as Adamson noted) “dispositions” and “modes of life” “always go together—and the mode of life that Christians find themselves living is not one conducive to behavior in accord with Christian ethics. [Note that Adamson failed to note here the irony that the society that Christians were living in was *one of their own making*!]

A few pages later (pp. 237 238) Adamson stated:

“Christianity has conquered the world,” it is said. On purely historical grounds, one would be inclined to say that the world had conquered Christianity. But whichever be the truth, there remains the acknowledged want of any delineation, from the point of view of Christian principle, of the structure of society wherein that principle finds adequate development.

The “Christianity has conquered the world” quoted by Adamson here was given no citation by him, perhaps because it was a commonly-occurring claim at the time. However, Adamson *may* have “lifted” the phrase from Sir [James George Frazier](#)’s [1854 – 1941] [The Golden Bough](#) (first published in 1890, in two volumes), for in this work Frazier had [said](#):

It was this ethical side of religion which the Hebrew prophets, inspired with a noble ideal of God’s goodness and holiness, were never weary of inculcating. Thus Micah says: “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” And at a later time much of the force by which Christianity conquered the world was drawn from the same high conception of God’s moral nature and the duty laid on men of conforming themselves to it. “Pure religion and undefiled,” says St. James, “before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

(Note, however, that the above quote is dated 1922, so that I’m not sure whether or not it appears in the first edition of *Bough*.)

Also, however, an examination of the <http://books.google.com> web site reveals that “Christianity conquered the world” occurred in a number of books published prior to 1900. For example,

James Edwin Odlin, in his [\*New Concepts of Old Dogmas: A Book of Sermons\*](#) (1892) had said (p. 53):

They said Christ wrought wonders. We say Christ wrought righteousness. But yet the ethics of the first church super-abounded; the reason why Christianity conquered the world was that Christianity was able to prove to the world that it had better morals than that world.

Robert William Mackay, in [\*The Tübingen School and its Antecedents: A Review of the History\*](#) (1863) had said (p. 199):

Christianity conquered the world by throwing itself on the inward resources of the soul; it solved the paradoxes and filled up the shortcomings of the actual out of the stores of the ideal, substituting at the same time for an effete preceptualism a direct appeal to the heart and conscience, and shewing that “righteousness” depends not so much on the external “word” or rule, as on the inward disposition of the soul, or the soil enabling it to fructify.

And, in [\*The London Quarterly Review\*](#) (1857) we find this (p. 18):

It was not by the adoption of such counsels as Mr. Jowett’s that Christianity conquered the world at first. Our Lord did not act upon them; nor did Peter and John; nor Paul and Silas; nor the martyrs of the early Church; nor Luther, and Calvin, and Knox; nor Wesley and Whitefield.

However, in [I John 5:1 – 6](#) [we find this](#):

<sup>1</sup>Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. <sup>2</sup>This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. <sup>3</sup>In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, <sup>4</sup>for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. <sup>5</sup>Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

The “overcoming of the world” in this passage may, then, be the *ultimate* source for the “Christianity conquered the world” phrase.

But whatever may be the source of the “Christianity conquered the *world*” part of the phrase in question, it seems clear that the part of the phrase that refers to “the world conquering *Christianity*” goes back to Robert Adamson.

More important than the phrase’s *origin*, however, is its *meaning*: The phrase would seem to imply that as Christianity expanded in the number of its adherents, (a) that expansion involved—even *necessitated*—the development of some sort of bureaucracy, (b) that bureaucracy “naturally” came to develop a *leadership* group, even a (c) near-*autocratic* such group, so that (d) the organization came ever more to resemble the *secular* (i.e., governmental) organizations of the time. As this occurred, (e) the *values* [5] that may have characterized the religion in the beginning—or, at least, had been espoused by Jesus—gradually gave way to the values that were dominant in the societies of the time.

This second perspective on Christianity, with its implicit reference to organizational development, also suggests that the *reason* why Christianity became a religion *about* Jesus is that as organizational development occurred, the leadership came to sense (at an unconscious level) that their *positions* of leadership would be most secure if the organization they headed were “just another organization” within the Roman Empire, one that did not have a conflictual relationship with the Empire (and thereby resulting, possibly, in the *persecution* of “Christians”). Thus, guided unconsciously by motives of *self-interest*, they shaped Christianity in such a way that the organization would *continue* to exist, and even *grow* in number of adherents, thereby protecting their positions as leaders of the organization.

(Note that leadership positions would be filled, not with the use of a *random* procedure, for example, but by certain individuals coming forward and *offering* themselves as leaders. Such individuals would tend to be people more assertive than their fellows, often having, perhaps unawares, a need—because of a feeling of insecurity?—for recognition, power, and/or status. Given that such needs would tend to be stronger in those individuals than a commitment to the values that (ostensibly) initiated the movement in the first place, it would be almost inevitable that as the number of adherents increased, necessitating the development of an organizational structure, the leaders who emerged would tend to *re-direct* the movement’s orientation—in a direction that was advantageous to *them*; and they would do this without even having a conscious *intention* of so doing.)

*How* could they shape Christianity so that it would best “fit in”? De-emphasize the values associated with Jesus and the other personages of the New Testament in favor of (a) a set of *beliefs* regarding Jesus, and (b) a set of *rituals* that related to Jesus’s life (birth, death, resurrection, ascension)—that would also help divert the attention of laity *away* from the matter of values and proper behavior. By posing as the “experts” about Jesus, Paul, etc., they would be able to convince their congregants that they were promulgating the “correct”—the orthodox—version of Christianity; and if one were *raised* in that version of Christianity, one would simply *take for granted* that one was learning the correct version of Christianity.

After all, given that one was not literate, one was not able to *read* the books of the New Testament, and therefore had no basis for *questioning* what one was being “informed” regarding what was in the New Testament. When one *heard* certain passages read, one might *sense* that one was being “hoodwinked” by one’s religious leaders, but would not be in a position—intellectual or otherwise—to *question* their authority.

Note that these leaders did not *ignore* the matter of *proper behavior*, but rather than focusing on *how one should relate to other people*, they emphasized one’s obligations for participating in various *rituals*. They continued to give “lip service” to behavior in a moral sense, but by their de-emphasis of moral behavior, they sent the message to congregants that it was permissible for them to live by “the world’s” values to an important degree. [6]

It would seem, then, that one could argue that the reason for Christianity's early success [7] was that it (a) did not place a heavy burden on its adherents, so far as behavior was concerned, and (b) adopted features of the pagan religions of the time (e.g., virgin birth, resurrection) that reduced the "foreignness" of Christianity for the non-Jewish people of the Roman Empire. The later "success" of Christianity was, of course, due to [Constantine](#)'s toleration of the religion (himself becoming a "Christian"), and [Theodosius](#)'s making Christianity the official religion of the Empire in 380 CE.

These, then, are two *different* perspectives on what happened with Christianity over time, but as my discussion indicated, they are closely *related* perspectives.

To summarize regarding what happened with Christianity, in its development during the first few centuries: It became a religion that had *little in common* with the religion of Jesus—as described (in varying ways!) in the canonical gospels. *That* fact is neatly encapsulated—each in its own way—by the two epigrams discussed in this essay. What's so pathetic about this "evolutionary" development is that that few adherents of the religion *today* seem to recognize that the religion they practice has virtually no relationship to the religion practiced by the "founder" of their religion!

## Endnotes

1. The allusion here is to [An History of the Corruptions of Christianity](#) (London: The British and Foreign Unitarian Association, 1782, 1871) by noted scientist [Joseph Priestley](#) [1733 – 1804].
2. See the Appendix.
3. For an excellent short discussion of Christianity's "pagan" elements see Robert M. Price's "[The Christ Myth and the Christian Goddess](#)."
4. In (pp. 212 – 242) [Ethical Democracy: Essays in Social Dynamics](#), edited by Stanton Coit. London: Grant Richards, 1900.
5. It is important to note that the *values* promoted in the New Testament can be thought of as having a *biological* basis (a point that will be developed in the next section). This fact is being brought out by, e.g., the [Greater Good Science Center](#) at Berkeley and by primatological research by, e.g., [Frans de Waal](#). The irony of this fact is that our society's dominant values—the "holy trinity" of greed, materialism, and selfishness—are not only "unnatural," but are held as firmly (virtually) by this society's "Christians" as its non-Christians!
6. I feel obligated at this point to identify an *alternate* explanation for Christianity's change in character. Stevan L. Davies, in a brilliant book ([Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity](#). New York: Continuum, 1995) emphasizes the role of "Spirit possession"

in the Bible—in the “ministry” of Jesus in particular—and argues that (p.171) “It is historical *bedrock* that the first Christians formed a cult oriented to experience of the spirit. In the words of [C. K. Barrett](#), ‘No more certain statement can be made about the Christians of the first generation than this: they believed themselves to be living under the immediate government of the Spirit of God.’” Davies goes on to state (P. 170) that “A Christianity premised on the induced emergence of the religious trance state ‘Kingdom of God’ would have inevitably declined in the absence of the talented inducer of that state.” That is, with the “talented inducer” (of an altered state of consciousness) Jesus gone, it was inevitable that the character of the “first generation” Christianity would change—and it *did*, in the manner that I have been discussing.

Davies observes (p. 174) that “The spirit-possession cult of formative Christianity probably lasted only for one or perhaps two generations.” Significantly, he adds that (p. 175) “study of Massachusettes Puritanism, Wesleyanism, the Quaker movement, and so forth, will show that over a few generations such initially ecstatic movements can gain elite adherents, seek social respectability, bring about the upgrading of members’ socio-economic status (through mutual assistance and self-discipline), develop patterns of institutionalized group leadership, revise entry requirements to focus on adherence to doctrinal and moral norms, and allow for ‘birthright’ membership. These social changes, in practically all cases, bring about a decline in focus on psychophysiological possession experiences and can rather quickly lead to the marginalization of the spirit-possessed prophets and ‘ecstatics’ who formed the group’s initial membership.”

7. Keep in mind that “success” is a relative term, for it has [been estimated](#) that as late as 250 CE only 2% of the people in the Roman Empire were “Christians”—and that the “Christians” of that time were a rather diverse group: [Hegesippus](#) [c110 – c180] had identified a number of “heresies” existing in his time, and later [Epiphanius of Salamis](#) (Cyprus) [310-320 – 433] identified 80 “heresies”! A “heresy” here, of course, is merely a version of Christianity that differs from one’s own version—i.e., it is a highly subjective concept, used primarily by “orthodox” leaders as a device to maintain control over their flocks.

## **Appendix: A Single Answer to Two Questions?**

Is it possible that the questions—(1) Why did the religion *of* Jesus become (merely) a religion *about* Jesus? and (2) Why were the (canonical) gospels written?—have a *common* answer?

Let me begin here by noting that it is well known that although the biographies (i.e., “gospels”) of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John occur at the *beginning* of the New Testament, those “books” were all written *after* Paul’s letters were composed. *That* fact raises—for me, at least—the question: Why did a need arise for them to be written? What *motivated* their writing?

I would suggest that the answer may lie in this passage in [Romans 7](#):



<sup>21</sup> So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. <sup>22</sup> For in my inner being I delight in God's law; <sup>23</sup> but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. <sup>24</sup> What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

The “law of sin” that Paul referred to here was presumably the “flesh” referred to in [Galatians 5](#):

<sup>16</sup> So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever<sup>[e]</sup> you want.

The “whatever you want” here is not what you want *intellectually* but, rather, what your “flesh” (sometimes translated as “human nature”) “wants.” Although “flesh”—or “human nature”—may be an accurate translation of the relevant word here, it is better to think of one’s biological “drives” in conjunction with one’s *acquired* nature (as an “inmate” of one’s society) as being the “forces” propelling one in a direction contrary to one’s “will”—i.e., that direction to which one gives one’s intellectual assent.

Now if one recognizes in oneself a conflict between forces that “drive” one and that which one accepts intellectually (a conflict somewhat comparable to that experienced with [cognitive dissonance](#)), processes—acting at an unconscious level—may be set in motion within oneself that will work to *resolve* that conflict.

Here is how that one resolution may occur:

One learns of the existence of a brief “biography” of Jesus, and recognizes, at an unconscious level, that the existence of such a work provides an opportunity to create a religion *about* Jesus, while giving the impression—to others *and* oneself—that one is actually *continuing* the religion *of* Jesus. Thus, one encourages the “biographication” of Jesus—resulting in the (1) creation of “biographies” of Jesus and (2) thereby unwittingly (so far as the conscious mind is concerned) contributes to the transformation of the Jesus movement—from one that strives to *continue* the religion of Jesus to one that is primarily *about* Jesus, while *ostensibly* continuing the religion of Jesus.

## **A New Variety of Hansen's Disease?**

Alton C. Thompson

[Hansen's disease](#) (more commonly known as leprosy)—which has been a problem for humans for at least 4000 years—is a disease which, if untreated, “can be progressive, causing permanent damage to the skin, nerves, limbs and eyes.” A question that arises, however, is whether a new variety of the disease has arisen that attacks the *brain*.

The reason for my asking this question is that recently-retired James Hansen seems to have some sort of brain disorder, raising the suspicion that it is a new form of Hansen's disease.

James Hansen—who was Director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies for the past 40 years—is one of the leading climate (and specifically *global warming*) scientists in the world, and certainly the best-known one.

He was recently interviewed by individuals with [The National Memo](#), and writer Joe Conason has reported on that interview, Conason's report being published in a newspaper here in Milwaukee (among other places, I assume).

Hansen has been not only a *scientist*, but an *activist*, and he indicated in the interview that now that he is retired, he plans to even *intensify* his activism. Some of his past activism has resulted in his arrest, so it's likely that there will be even more arrests in the future.

While Hansen was with NASA, his activism—and the publicity it received—drew the attention of members of the George W. Bush administration, and efforts were made to silence him—but those efforts failed.

Engaging in protests is, of course, “as American as apple pie,” but one is led to ask: Doesn't Hansen realize that our *situation* today relative to global warming calls for actions *other* than activism? Also, doesn't he have the intelligence to realize that his *expertise in global warming* science does not qualify him to offer *solutions* to the problem?

Perhaps his problem is that he has become infected with a new virus, which can be thought of as a new variety of Hansen's disease. (Granted that [bacteria](#) are responsible for Hansen's disease, not *viruses*, but it should be obvious that I am being facetious here—so that I can be excused. You *will* excuse me, won't you?!)

Not only does Hansen not seem to recognize the futility of activism at present—especially given that a “[tipping point](#)” is likely to be crossed within a matter of decades (see [this](#), for example). *Suggestions* that he offers lack *realism*.

For example, he stated in the interview that we should start “putting an honest price on . . . fossil fuels . . .” But (a) that’s not like to occur, given the influence of energy companies on governmental policy in this country; and (b) even *if* this were to occur, it would just slow down the pace of global warming, thereby merely pushing the “tipping point” a little farther into the future.

Hansen also favors “a rapid worldwide expansion of nuclear power . . .” But *this* is not likely to occur either—in part because the energy companies want to continue to “push” fossil fuels, in part because many environmentalists would fight him on this, because of the dangers associated with that energy source.

Surely Hansen knows that the commonly-accepted (among climate scientists) value of a 2° C. rise in the global mean temperature as the “safe” limit (i.e., the tipping point) is a value placed too high—for [he has stated](#) as much. Surely he also knows that even if all humans everywhere were to cease using fossil fuels *tomorrow*, global warming would continue (“climate change commitment”—see Section 5 in [this eBook](#)). If this “commitment” value is 1° C., that value added to the amount of increase that has *already* occurred (i.e., 0.8° C.), would give a total increase of 1.8° C.—i.e., an amount very close to the tipping point. And if the “commitment” value is 1.5° C., rather, the total amount of increase (2.3° C.) would be such that crossing the tipping point would be *inevitable*.

We should not *want* to cross that point—for it is likely to mean a severe culling of the world’s population, perhaps to the point of the extinction of our species!

This is no time for dawdling!—and Hansen should know it. The fact that he *doesn’t* appear to suggests that his brain is diseased.

## **[“I Hope You Can Swim, Because You’re in De Nial”](#)**

Alton C. Thompson

Lawrence Davidson, in a recent essay on Richard Falk, [has this to say](#):

The ugly fact is that, most Americans have been kept dangerously ignorant of the wanton damage caused by their government’s foreign policies, and those who would prevent them from knowing the truth are, at the very least, indirectly responsible for terrorist attacks launched in reaction to those policies.

(Falk is the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian territories.)

What provoked this comment by Davidson is reactions to Falk’s “[A Commentary on the Marathon Murders](#),” which was written in response to the recent “Boston Massacre.”

Davidson points out, for example, that

Washington’s ambassador to the United Nations, [Susan Rice, said](#) that she was “outraged by Richard Falk’s highly offensive Boston comments. Someone who spews such vitriol has no place at the UN. Past time for him to go.” Similar statements came from members of Congress who are [collecting signatures](#) on a letter demanding that President Obama [i.e., O’Bomber!] “take action” against Falk.

Note that Ambassador Rice did not question the *accuracy* of Falk’s remarks, only the fact that they were “offensive”—although it would appear that offended her about Falk’s remarks was that they *were* accurate!

Rice, like so many of our leaders, is in denial regarding our foreign policy—something that William Blum comments on in his reports every month—e.g., the most recent one being “[Anti-Empire Report # 166](#).”

This denial, on the part of our leaders, is not just an *intellectual* matter; it has *effects*:

- Continued atrocities by *our* government—as well as by that of *Israel* (which we allow to control a significant portion of our foreign policy).
- “[Blowback](#)” in *response* to those atrocities.

Our reaction to “terrorists” reflects how deeply we are mired in denial: In asking why a particular “terrorist” became “radicalized,” we look in every direct except the *correct* one—our *foreign policies*.

This denial on the part of our political leaders is bad enough, but what's about as despicable is a craven press that eschews an adversary relationship with our political leaders in favor of simply mouthing the "official line" rather than the truth about our foreign policy and its effects. As a result, the typical citizen in this country is grossly misinformed regarding the evils that our country continually commits abroad. "Beacon to the world"? Yah, sure!

The denial practiced by our leaders regarding our country's *role in the world* likely will not eventuate in our society's collapse; but their denial of *global warming's* reality is likely to have such a result. And as unfortunate as this will be for *our own* population, it will be *doubly* unfortunate for peoples elsewhere, for:

- Global warming is likely to wipe out *most* of the world's population within a few decades, not just ours.
- Although Western countries, such as the United States, *deserve* this fate—for it is those countries that are most *responsible* for global warming—as the name suggests, global warming is a phenomenon that will affect people *everywhere, whether or not they bear responsibility for it*.

Humans are supposedly intelligent creatures; and given that the human brain developed as an aid to our survival as a species, one might think that it's inevitable that we would be *using* our brains now for that purpose. Needless to say, however, we aren't—and our denial of global warming's reality may cause us to (figuratively) drown, thereby allowing some other species to emerge to dominance.

It [has been said](#) that "where there is no vision, the people perish." Today, however, it might be more accurate to say that without leaders in the West (the United States in particular) with vision, and a willingness to "face facts," our *species* is in danger of going the way of the dinosaurs—but for very different reasons.

## [Planting the Wrong Seeds](#)

Alton C. Thompson

A [recent article](#) (by Harrison H. Schmitt and William Happer) in the *Wall Street Journal* (pronounced “urinal” by some—well, at least *I* do!) claimed that

the conventional wisdom about carbon dioxide is that it is a dangerous pollutant. That's simply not the case. Contrary to what some would have us believe, increased carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will benefit the increasing population on the planet by increasing agricultural productivity.

For most plants, and for the animals and humans that use them, more carbon dioxide, far from being a "pollutant" in need of reduction, would be a benefit.

This is a point of view that flies in the face of the “conventional wisdom” regarding global warming (whose principal cause to this point has been a human-induced increase in the CO<sub>2</sub> content of the lower atmosphere), and the authors have been criticized for expressing their “heretical” views. [Phil Plait](#) has, for example, stated:

Simply claiming increased CO<sub>2</sub> will help plants grow while ignoring everything else it does is a stunningly tone-deaf argument, yet one [that] [deniers seem to use over and over again](#). Looking at a few plants growing better due to more CO<sub>2</sub> is like ignoring that you killed a patient while curing their hangnail.

Is there, however, a more *substantial* case that can be built against the claim that increasing carbon content of the atmosphere would *not* “be a benefit”? Let me briefly cite three recent articles that make no reference to the *Journal* article, but that offer varying refutations of its argument.

First, a recent study by researchers at Northern Arizona University reached [these conclusions](#):

Global warming may initially make the grass greener, but not for long, according to new research conducted at Northern Arizona University.

The study, published this week in *Nature Climate Change*, shows that plants may thrive in the early stages of a warming environment but begin to deteriorate quickly.

“We were really surprised by the pattern, where the initial boost in growth just went away,” said **Zhuoting Wu**, NAU doctoral graduate in biology. “As the ecosystems adjust, the responses changed.”

Granted that this study did not make specific reference to an increase in the level of carbon dioxide, but as global warming involves warming (!)—as a result of such an increase—it calls into question the conclusions of the Schmitt-Happer article—which somehow ignored the fact that global warming involves warming (duh!), and that warming *per se* might be a problem for plants!

Second, a [\*Times of India\*](#) report states that

More than half of common plants and one third of the animals could see a dramatic decline this century due to climate change, according to research published today in the journal *Nature Climate Change*.

Researchers from the University of East Anglia looked at 50,000 globally widespread and common species and found that more than one half of the plants and one third of the animals will lose more than half of their climatic range by 2080 if nothing is done to reduce the amount of [global warming](#) and slow it down.

Plants become adapted to certain temperature, humidity, precipitation, wind, conditions, and specifically to a certain *pattern* of annual changes in those conditions. With the mean *temperature* increasing, the “range” of a given plant species changes (*contracts*, usually); and the increase in *variability* in atmospheric conditions associated with global warming makes [survival per se](#) difficult.

Third, and most surprising, is the possibility that [plants even contribute to global warming](#):

Plants take carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) out of the atmosphere to do photosynthesis, and thus help reduce the greenhouse gases warming the planet. At least, that’s how the story went before researchers from the Carnegie Institution for Science (CIS) realized that today’s carbon dioxide levels cause the plants to behave in a way that actually contributes to global warming.

Writing in the latest issue of the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the CIS scientists unveiled new research that shows increased carbon dioxide levels cause plants to retain water that otherwise would have evaporated from their leaves, entered the atmosphere and helped cool the planet. At local levels, this effect can increase the temperature so that it is 25 percent higher than what the greenhouse effect would have done on its own.

Given this recent research, the *Wall Street Journal* has been doing us humans a disservice by publishing pieces such as the Schmitt-Happer article. Is its commitment to business so obsessive that its editors are willing to ignore the findings and views of most climate scientists in favor of a minority “denial” point of view—one driven by ideology, and receiving much of its financial support for fossil fuel companies? Aren’t these people interested in the sort of world that their *grandchildren* will be living in?—assuming, that is, that *anyone* will be alive in 50 years!

They *should* be—as this recent [article by Justin Gillis](#) suggests. Especially as [methane](#) begins to replace carbon dioxide as the key “greenhouse” gas.

## **A Good Analysis. But . . .**

Alton C. Thompson

Cory Morningstar, in her recent “[McKibben’s Divestment Tour](#),” exposes Bill McKibben’s current divestment tour for what it is—a sham. As she points out:

Industrialized capitalism is destructive, by its very nature, to all life on Earth. This is even more so when wedded to investment capital. Every living thing on the planet is now on its way to being commodified—including people, who are now considered “human capital” in 21<sup>st</sup> century parlance.

The fact that the Existing Order *per se* is at the root of the threat that global warming poses for our species currently is one that McKibben is failing to note on his tour. Whether this is due to ignorance on his part, to his “embeddedness” in the Existing Order, or some other factor, the fact of the matter is that his tour involves no critique of the Existing Order.

In fact, McKibben is not even honest about how dire is the threat posed by global warming. Morningstar quotes this from the <http://math.350.org/> web site that McKibben established:

It’s simple math: we can emit **565 more gigatons of carbon dioxide** and stay below **2°C of warming**—anything more than that risks catastrophe for life on earth. (Bolding in original.)

Given that the global mean has increased by “only” 0.8° C. since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the above statement makes it appear that global warming poses no imminent threat—so that we have plenty of time to address the problem.

What this quotation fails to add, however, is that “that we are already committed to a minimum temperature increase of 2.4°C ([Ramanathan and Feng](#)), even if we stop burning *all* fossil fuels today.” [I have added the link to this Ramanathan-Feng article—as I believe that it is the one she is referring to.] That is, it is *inevitable* that there will be a further 1.6° C. increase in the global mean temperature [ $0.8 + 1.6 = 2.4$ ], so that it is *inevitable* that we will “achieve”—and *exceed*—the 2° C. increase in the global mean that has been the consensus “safe” value with climate scientists. Surely McKibben is aware of this fact; why, then, is he making a fool of himself by pretending otherwise on this tour? Psychologists may have an answer to this question, but I cannot fathom what it might be!

Morningstar rightly notes that “Wall Street is the very root cause of our multiple and ever accelerating ecological and economic crises, not to mention the global food crisis.” She then adds:



350.org locals take their marching orders straight from the top (350.org International) while “the top” (McKibben *et al.*) take their marching orders directly from their funders—and in the case of 350.org’s Do the Math Tour, those funders are Wall Street investors.

Which raises the question: How is it possible that McKibben can be so obtuse as to not recognize that those who are *funding* his “operation” are the very people who are ultimately *responsible* for the problem that his operation is ostensibly addressing? It boggles the mind to think that there is a rational explanation for how McKibben would be able to reconcile, in his mind, this paradox.

Morningstar sadly summarizes the bulk of the “climate movement”—not just Bill McKibben’s part of it—thusly:

As surreal as it is, the so-called climate movement has sabotaged any chance of mitigating a full scale global ecological collapse, having instead cleared the way for corporate profiteering, deforestation, fund-raising and full-out omnicide. Collectively, this faction of the 1% values their privilege more than life itself.

Whether Morningstar is correct in asserting that members of the conventional “climate movement” value “their privilege more than life itself,” the fact of the matter is that there is good reason to think that such people are even more evil than the people whom they are criticizing—for they are misleading people., and thereby almost assuring that our species will either be thoroughly decimated by global warming within a few decades, or rendered extinct.

Another fact, however, is that Morningstar offers no solution to the problem of global warming—so that one is led to wonder why she even bothered to write her article: It offers us not a shred of hope!

As I argue in Section 5 of a [recent eBook](#), I believe it inevitable that global warming will wipe out most of the world’s population within a few decades—*regardless of what we do*—but that the *communitarian* option offers us some degree of hope.

I am honest enough to admit that I lack both the financial resources and entrepreneurial ability to myself launch an effort for a proliferation of eco-communities, but I wish that *someone* would: I have four grandchildren, with a fifth on the way, and fear mightily for their future!

## Why the Timidity?

Alton C. Thompson

[Joseph J. Romm](#)—a Senior Fellow at the [Center for American Progress](#)—“is an American author, blogger, physicist<sup>[1]</sup> and climate expert<sup>[2]</sup> who concentrates on methods of reducing [greenhouse gas](#) emissions and [global warming](#) and increasing [energy security](#) through [energy efficiency](#), [green energy](#) technologies and green transportation technologies.” As a part of his association with the Center for American Progress, “he maintains and edits their climate blog, [Climate Progress](#), which focuses on climate science, policy and reporting.<sup>[36]</sup>”

Romm’s writings for this web site display a good grasp of the science associated with global warming, but I have two problems with those writings:

- He seemingly believes that his expertise in the *science* of global warming qualifies him for making *policy* recommendations, and in doing so he shows a preference for those policies that involve no critique of the Existing Order. Given that one can argue that it is that Order which is the *fundamental* cause of our “environmental problem,” the solutions that he offers amount to mere “tinkering”—i.e., actions that amount to “fiddlin’ while Rome burns.” What *that* fact implies is that the solutions that he offers, because they divert attention *away from* the ultimate source of the problem of global warming, do us humans a tremendous disservice.
- In discussing the *effects* of global warming, he tends to make *suggestive*, rather than *explicit/direct* comments, and thereby fails to convey to the reader the seriousness of the problem that global warming presents for us humans.

Of these two problems, only the second is given attention here, and I suppose that I should begin by answering a question that may be on the minds of some:

The concern of a given scientist is with describing, and attempting to explain, some phenomenon, or group of phenomena, chosen for study. Describing, or projecting, *effects* of the phenomenon/phenomena on other phenomena would be outside the scope of the given scientist’s interests and expertise, so why expect him/her to comment on effects?

There is merit in this question, but I would first note that Romm’s orientation is not so much to *contributing* to global warming science, but to *reporting* on the findings of others. This means that he should not be regarded as a scientist—and I think it likely that he has the intelligence not to *label* himself as a scientist. The facts that he “concentrates on methods of reducing [greenhouse gas](#) emissions and [global warming](#) and increasing [energy security](#) through [energy](#)

[efficiency](#), [green energy](#) technologies and green transportation technologies” indicates that he perceives his expertise as being in those areas, rather than that of being a climate scientist.

I would go on to add that *underlying* his concerns—as stated above—is, however, an interest in the *effects* of global warming: It is the fact that global warming has, and will increasingly have, deleterious *effects* that obviously motivates the writings/actions that Romm engages in. Given this, why does he not state, or speculate about, those effects more explicitly? How to explain his timidity, his hesitancy?

Before offering some comments relative to that question, let me offer a series of quotations from a [recent article](#) by Romm; some being statements *by* Romm, some being statements *quoted* by Romm:

- [Scientists] didn’t believe humanity would be as self-destructive as [brainless frogs](#) and ignore the increasingly dire warnings for over two decades now.
- we are headed to 11F and just keeping to 7F will take a major effort. But warming beyond 7F is *“incompatible with organized global community, is likely to be beyond ‘adaptation’, is devastating to the majority of ecosystems & has a high probability of not being stable (i.e. 4°C [7F] would be an interim temperature on the way to a much higher equilibrium level,”* as climate expert Kevin Anderson explains [here](#).
- Everyone interested in what we face should read the recent [World Bank Climate Report](#), which concluded, “A 4°C [7°F] world can, and must, be avoided” to avert “devastating” impacts. Also worth reading is the [Royal Society Special Issue on Global Warming](#), which details the “hellish vision” of 7°F (4°C) world . . . .
- . . . a 4°C world would be facing enormous adaptation challenges in the agricultural sector, with large areas of cropland becoming unsuitable for cultivation, and declining agricultural yields.
- In . . . a 4°C world, the limits for human adaptation are likely to be exceeded in many parts of the world, while the limits for adaptation for natural systems would largely be exceeded throughout the world.”
- folks that aren’t motivated to avoid the civilization-destroying 9°F by 2100 won’t be moved by whatever happens after that.

What most of these statements suggest is that serious trouble lies ahead for us humans, but a question asked by Romm at the very beginning of his paper suggests otherwise, thereby affecting how one will tend to *interpret* what follows:

How much warming will we subject our children and countless future generations to?

It's true that Romm then goes on to provide a rather detailed answer to this question, but what I would call the reader's attention to is his reference to "our children and countless future generations . . . ." What this reference *implies* is that global warming will do little, if any, *culling* of the world's population, and will merely make living *difficult* for "our children." What's odd about this tacit statement on Romm's part is that one climate scientist he names in his paper—Britain's Prof. Kevin Anderson—*has* been explicit about this, going so far as declaring that global warming is likely to wipe out *most* of the world's population within a few decades.

Why is Anderson so forthright on this matter, and Romm so timid? Scientists—such as Prof. Kevin Anderson—tend to be more cautious in their statements than non-scientists such as Joseph J. Romm, but the "tables are turned" in this case, as Anderson is the less timid of the two. *Why* this is the case may reflect some difference between Britain and the United States—or may reflect the fact that Anderson feels more secure in his position (at the [Tyndal Centre](#)) than does Romm at the Center for American Progress. Or . . . .

Regardless of the *reasons* for Romm's hesitancy in being more explicit, he does us humans no service in being timid. In fact, in (a) not *identifying* the Existing Order as the ultimate cause of the global warming problem, (b) not offering solutions *consistent* with such an identification, and (c) not even expounding on the *severity* of the problem of global warming, Romm is "[an enemy of the people](#)"! I realize that that is strong language, but given the severity of the threat posed by global, it is a criticism that *must* be made.

## **Do Scenarios Have Value?**

Alton C. Thompson

At the *individual* level, scenario construction is common, occurring primarily during one's "free" time—either during a work day or on days off (unless one is retired, so that virtually *every* day is a "day off"). As one contemplates a future period of "free" time, one must consider various constraints (such as one's income, the length of the "free" time available, one's marital situation, etc.); but having done so, one can (a) construct a series of scenarios of possible activities that express one's interests, (b) evaluate each scenario from the standpoint of how fulfilling, productive, etc., the activities associated with that scenario are likely to be, and then (c) select one of the scenarios (or, alternatively, select a combination of scenarios, and pursue each, one after another) and (d) engage in the activities included in the scenario(s) selected. While one is doing so, events may occur that short-circuit one's plans (e.g., an automobile accident that puts one in the hospital), but such events, although they can be anticipated to some degree, tend not to interfere with one's plan-making.

Individuals not only create scenarios for themselves, but make choices from those scenarios, and act on those scenarios chosen—and usually those plans are set in motion "without a hitch." Surprises occur at times, of course, but such surprises rarely interfere with one's plans, and at times even turn out to be enjoyable—e.g., one may make a new acquaintance while pursuing one's plans, with that new acquaintance becoming a good friend.

A question that arises here is: Can scenario-formulation at the *societal* level be thought of as comparable to such formulation at the *individual* level? Some have evidently reached that conclusion, and I use this essay to comment on *one* such formulation—and then reach some conclusions on the wisdom of formulating societal-level scenarios.

While [Robert Costanza](#) was Director of the University of Maryland Institute for Ecological Economics he published "[Four Visions of the Century Ahead](#)" in *The Futurist* (February, 1999), and in that article noted that although (p. 23) "there are an infinite number of possible future visions," for the purpose of his article he would be laying out just "four such visions, each presented as a 'future history' written from the vantage point of the year 2100. These visions include both positive and negative scenarios—hopes and fears—allowing us to fully explore what the future may hold and thus to make informed choices among complex alternatives with a range of implications." (I should perhaps add here that after writing this article, Costanza became associated with the University of Vermont, then Portland State University, and is currently associated with the Australian National University.)



The four “visions” discussed by Costanza in his article are summarized in the following figure drawn from the article (p. 25):

Four Visions of the Year 2100			
Scenario Matrix:		THE REAL STATE OF THE WORLD	
		Optimists Are Right: Resources are unlimited.	Skeptics Are Right: Resources are limited.
WORLD VIEW AND POLICIES	Technological Optimism: Resources are unlimited. Technical progress can deal with any challenge. Competition promotes progress; markets are the guiding principle.	<b>STAR TREK</b> Fusion energy becomes practical, solving many economic and environmental problems. Humans journey to the inner solar system, where population continues to expand.	<b>MAD MAX</b> Oil production declines and no affordable alternative emerges. Financial markets collapse and governments weaken, too broke to maintain armies and control desperate, impoverished populations. The world is run by transnational corporations.
	Technological Skepticism: Resources are limited. Progress should depend less on technology and more on social and community development. Cooperation promotes progress; markets are the servants of larger goals.	<b>BIG GOVERNMENT</b> Governments sanction companies that fail to pursue public interests. Fusion energy is slow to develop due to strict safety standards. Family-planning programs stabilize growth, and incomes equalize.	<b>ECOTOPIA</b> Tax reforms favor ecologically beneficial industries and punish polluters and resource depleters. Habitation patterns reduce need for transportation and energy. A shift away from consumerism reduces waste.

As the figure indicates, the four scenarios identified and discussed by Costanza all have an orientation to *technology*, with his Star Trek and Mad Max scenarios being ones that express “technological optimism” with the Big Government and Ecotopia scenarios expressing “technological skepticism,” rather.

For details regarding these four scenarios the reader is referred to Costanza’s article; what I wish to comment on here is two aspects of the article, both of which strike me as fallacious.

First, when Costanza asks (p. 28) “How should society decide among these four visions?”, note that he *personifies* “society.” That is, he treats “society” not as a descriptive concept but, rather, as a unit that has an ability to think and make decisions. It’s of course true that thinking and decision-making *occur* in a society—by individuals and groups (governmental units, business concerns, church groups, etc.)—but a society *per se* has no such abilities. Even when decisions are made by members of a group—e.g., a state legislature—the individuals involved constitute but a small portion of the total, and may not make decisions with which the majority would agree.

To speak of *society* “deciding” is to use the language of fiction. The changes that will occur within a society will be the result of (a) *past* decisions made by various individuals/organizations, the (b) *results* of those decisions (e.g., the technological developments, and their deployment, resulting from those decisions), and (c) the decisions of a few individuals/organizations *now* (e.g., corporate and political leaders), among other possibilities. The abstraction “society” will not be doing any “deciding.”

Put another way, any society has a certain “inertia” which pushes it into the future, and that “push” combined with the “pull” of decisions made by certain individuals/organizations *now* will lead the society into the future—along with factors that cannot be anticipated in advance.

In discussing my first objection I have had to bring in my second objection as well, Costanza’s reference (p. 23) to “a vision of the world [that] we want.” As I have tried to make clear above, the world that we will be *getting* in the future is unlikely to be a future that most of us *want*—in part because most of us lack the decision-making ability to shape the future; and beyond that, it is not even likely to be a future that our *leaders* want.

Insofar as our leaders will be shaping the future, it appears that their shaping will be based more on their obsession with the profit motive than on scientific knowledge of what the future likely has in store for us humans. What seems likely is that societies will soon be collapsing—as a result of an intensification of the phenomena associated with global warming—and that our leaders, not anticipating this, will simply allow it to occur; and if they *do* act, it will be “too little, too late.”

Individuals and groups recognizing these strong possibilities will “take matters into their own hands;” they will realize that insofar as there is any hope for the future, it lies in efforts to (try to) *adapt*—following the communitarian option, for example. Such individuals might be thought of as following the “ecotopian” option identified by Costanza, but what Costanza fails to recognize in discussing that option is that the chaos that we will soon be experiencing, as a result of global warming, (a) will result in a severe culling of the world’s population, (b) the collapse of not only governments but societies, and (c) a difficult life for even those who follow the communitarian option—with the possibility that *no* members of our species will be alive in 2100 CE, *regardless* of what we do.

Needless to say, I perceive efforts such as Costanza’s as foolish—as not at all helpful. What must be done, rather, is to discern “[whither we are tending](#)” (to allude to a famous speech by Abraham Lincoln), to ignore what our leaders are doing and not doing, and proceed as individuals and groups to try to survive the calamities that lie ahead. Unfortunately, I fear that many in our midst who *recognize* that this is what they should do lack the means to *act* on that recognition.

## That Deceptive “Can”

Alton C. Thompson

On George Monbiot’s [web site](#), the following information is found relative to his book [Heat: How to Stop the Planet From Burning](#) (2006);

We know that climate change is happening. We know that it could, if the worst predictions come true, destroy the conditions which make human life possible. Only one question is now worth asking: can it be stopped? In *Heat*, George Monbiot shows that it can.

For the first time, he demonstrates that we can achieve the necessary cut— a 90% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030—without bringing civilisation to an end. Combining his unique knowledge of campaigning and environmental science, he shows how we can transform our houses, our power and our transport systems. But he also shows that this can happen only with a massive programme of action which no government has yet been prepared to take.

We are informed in this “blurb” that:

- “Climate change” is occurring (a phraseology that I dislike, given that the increasingly erratic weather that we are experiencing is rendering the very *concept* of “climate” obsolete).
- As the various phenomena associated with “global warming” intensify, a point in time could be reached such that the conditions that make human life possible would vanish.
- The only question worth asking now is: Can “global warming” be stopped?
- George Monbiot shows, in *Heat*, that it *can* be stopped.

There’s a “catch,” however, to Monbiot’s conclusion that what is commonly referred to as “global warming” can be stopped, for we also learn from Monbiot that:

- A “massive programme of action” would be required—the implicit suggestion here being that this “programme” would, of necessity, be one directed by national governments.
- No government has, of yet, been prepared to undertake such a program.

This latter admission—for it is precisely that—serves to destroy the very basis of Monbiot’s book; for if no government has, to this point in time, been prepared to undertake a program of the sort recommended by Monbiot, the implication is that this trend will *continue*. Were Monbiot



able to provide us with good reasons for believing that this pattern of (non-)behavior could be changed, his “admission” would be less deadly than it suggests.

But Monbiot fails to provide the reader with such a basis. In fact, as I observe the national government here in the United States, what I see is dominance by fossil fuel interests in the realm of energy policy (dominance by contractors on much of our military policy, dominance by Israel on our Middle Eastern policies, etc.). Given that those who direct the fossil fuel companies appear to be driven by short-term profits, and tend to be (seemingly) ignorant of what global warming *is* currently doing, and is likely to do even more in the *future*, I perceive absolutely no prospect of our national government undertaking the sort of program that Monbiot would like to see instituted. (Whether prospects are better in Britain is a matter that I am not prepared to comment on.)

Besides, even in the unlikely event that I am wrong about this, were our national government suddenly to make an “about face” and follow Monbiot’s suggestions, a transformation of our society simply could not be achieved “overnight.”

And *that* fact is highly significant, given:

- This [statement](#), in 2008, by V. Ramanathan and Y. Feng: “The observed increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases (GHGs) since the preindustrial era has most likely committed the world to a warming of 2.4°C (1.4°C to 4.3°C) above the preindustrial surface temperatures.”
- In conjunction with the fact that the consensus opinion with climate scientists that an increase of 2° C. or more over the pre-industrial global mean temperature would mean disaster.

Why? Because the increase over the pre-industrial temperature level so far has been about 0.8° C., and the “commitment” currently present in the atmosphere will guarantee that the 2° C. “limit” specified by climate scientists will be crossed—and we humans will be entering unknown territory.

Once one recognizes the above, one realizes not only that Monbiot’s book wasn’t worth *writing* (and isn’t worth *reading*), but that works of this sort are actually *dangerous* for they can have the effect—because they *divert* our attention from important facts—of *reducing* the likelihood that our species will still be present on Planet Earth in 2100 CE.

I have argued in previous essays that because the Existing Order is at the root of the global warming crisis that we have begun to face, solutions that fail to recognize that fact are *worse* than worthless. Given that so few analyses of the problem recognize that basic fact, it is extremely difficult to have any optimism regarding the human future.

## [A Neological Solution?](#)

Alton C. Thompson

it's time to talk bluntly about the terrorists of our world. Yes, I know, 9/11 was horrific. Almost 3,000 dead, massive towers down, [apocalyptic scenes](#). And yes, when it comes to terror attacks, the Boston Marathon bombings weren't pretty either. But in both cases, those who committed the acts paid for or will pay for their crimes.

In the case of the terrorists—and here I'm referring in particular to the [men](#) who run what may be the [most profitable corporations](#) on the [planet](#), giant energy companies like [ExxonMobil](#), [Chevron](#), [ConocoPhillips](#), [BP](#), and [Shell](#)—you're the one who's going to pay, especially your children and grandchildren. You can take one thing for granted: not a single terrorist will ever go to jail, and yet they certainly knew what they were doing.

[Tom Engelhardt](#), “[Terracide and the Terrorists](#)”

I agree with Tom Engelhardt that it is useful to add the words “terracide” and “terrorist” to our vocabulary—for they suggest strongly that those who are “destroying the planet [that] we live on” are comparable to the *political* terrorists who have dominated the news during the past few years. And, as he implies, the terrorists are in a separate category of evil because:

- Unlike terrorists, whose actions are less a matter of free choice than reactions (“blowback”) to aggressive activities by our military, the terrorists “know what they are doing”—and are not acting in response to external pressures.
- The killing done by terrorists involves a less clear connection between acts and results (killing being among them), but involves incomparably more people—conceivably the entire species (to say nothing of *other* species).

The killing by terrorists is similar to the killing of terrorists in that in both cases those killed tend to be innocents. And although the acts of terrorists result in *immediate* deaths and injuries, whereas the actions perpetrated by terrorists are more “down the road” than immediate, the result is the same—death and injury, but with terrorism being far more serious in having the potential of wiping out much of life on earth.

Let me, however, qualify my agreement with Engelhardt that the terrorists in our midst “know, and have known, what they were doing.” I assume that this is a true statement, but there is a larger truth here: The terrorists are part of the Existing Order. Granted that they are the *dominant* members of that Order but, still, they are mere *creatures* of that Order. The Order existed before they were born—they did not create that Order. They may have helped *shape* it,

true, but in doing so merely helped in its logical development—rather than worked to *re-direct* it. This is not to excuse their actions from a moral or legal standpoint, of course; it is merely to “understand” those actions.

Given this, although I am glad that Engelhardt is adding these two words to the language, I would add that creating neologisms will not solve the global warming problem that faces us. In fact, even if labeling the CEOs of BP, Shell, etc., were to result in those gentlemen making an “about face” (unlikely!), whatever new actions they engaged in would do nothing to “save” us. The CO<sub>2</sub> currently in the atmosphere is sufficient to cause a crossing of the “tipping point” at some point in the future; and as warming occurs, with the release of methane in northern regions adding to the warming problem, the future of our species becomes a giant question mark.

What Engelhardt needs to realize is that it is now too late to halt further warming (with its attending other atmospheric phenomena—such as increased storminess). Our only hope now lies with trying to *adapt*; and given the likelihood that global warming will be wiping out most of the world’s population within a few decades, even adaptation is not a panacea.

Thinking about our future is depressing in the extreme, and the temptation is to simply “give up”—to divert one’s attention from the future, and immerse oneself in diversions. But I continue to believe that it is worthwhile to at least *try* to survive, by engaging in adaptive activities.

It’s true, I suppose, that one may gain *psychological* benefits from railing against evil CEOs, participating in protest marches, signing petitions, etc., but such activities do not qualify as adaptive activities—and are, for that reason, a (virtual) waste of precious time.

## **Geo-Engineering vs. Adaptation**

Alton C. Thompson

In September of last year AMEG (the Arctic Methane Emergency Group) [1] stated that:

substantial areas of the continental shelf are already in critical condition as a result of the warming of the Arctic Ocean seabed. Increasingly large quantities of methane are being emitted. Moreover, there is the possibility of methane held as hydrates or under thawing permafrost being suddenly released in very large quantities due to a disturbance such as an earthquake. The quantities of methane in the continental shelf are so vast that a release of only one or two percent of this methane could lead to the release of the remaining methane in an unstoppable chain reaction. Global warming would spiral upward beyond the 2 degrees which many scientists consider the safety limit.

And went on to declare:

Intervention on a large scale has to be accepted immediately in order to cool the Arctic and avert the ultimate catastrophe of runaway global warming. No amount of adaptation could make runaway global warming survivable. We call on all nations to come together in a cooperative effort to fight this existential threat. It is a moral duty to combat the destruction of the climate system—in order to protect the lives of all the world’s inhabitants.

I assume that AMEG is correct in assuming that the quantity of methane in the continental shelf is “vast,” and that because “a methane emission will have 25 times the effect on temperature of a carbon dioxide emission of the same mass over the following 100 years,” the imminent release of a vast amount of methane would—will!?—be catastrophic. It is understandable, then, why AMEG would declare that “Intervention on a large scale has to be accepted immediately . . . .”

The problem that I have with that assertion, however, is that it reflects a *control mentality*—i.e., the same mentality that is at the root of . . . not only the environmental crisis that we face today, but virtually *all*—from an *ultimate* standpoint—of the problems that we humans face today.

It would seem—on the basis of archaeological and anthropological studies—that our distant ancestors had an *adaptive mentality*, being *forced* (from a survival standpoint) to have such a mentality by the circumstances of their lives. With the development of agriculture, however, not only were there changes in the *activities* associated with sustenance, but also changes on how people *related* to one another: The relatively egalitarian relationships that had formerly existed within groups began to give way to relationships of dominance and submission, and the former adaptive mentality came to be replaced with a control mentality on the part of some, and one of submission on the part of those controlled.

With the “birth” of this control mentality in the *social* realm, it is not surprising that *technological change* (given a positive “spin” by referring to it as “development”!) was spurred; and given that *that* change was especially directed at the environment, it was “natural” for all

members of a given society (not just those with a control mentality) to adopt a control *stance* relative to the environment.[2]

I am not surprised, then, that AMEG advises “intervention”—not only because the societies of which its members are a part are dominated by individuals and institutions with control mentalities, but because *science itself involves a control mentality*. Thus, even though a scientist typically plays little role in directed the course of a *society*, a scientist’s pursuit of *science* involves *exercise* of a control mentality.[3]

What members of AMEG mean by “intervention” is “geo-engineering,” of course, and this fact has been [commented upon](#) recently by Rachel Smolker and Almuth Emsting:

[Members of AMEG] are united in their faith that geoengineering can work and that humans can avert an even greater climate disaster by manipulating the planet’s atmosphere and biosphere. They do not appear concerned about what unilateral action taken by a government to deliberately manipulate planetary systems might mean for democracy and the rights of most of the world’s population. This is perhaps because they are convinced that geoengineering is the only way of keeping the planet habitable (at least for most humans). But this conviction is not derived from scientific knowledge—it is based on unwavering faith in human ability to master and control nature through engineering and technology.

As I indicated above, AMEG contends that “No amount of adaptation could make runaway global warming survivable.” But as Smolker and Emsting note, AMEG’s claim here is rooted in the control mentality of AMEG members, rather than in empirical facts—this control mentality being reflected in their predilection of suggesting engineering/technological solutions to problems, without even considering other possibilities.

Smolker and Emsting are among those who have pointed out that approaching Earth System with a control mentality is a potentially dangerous matter, because our possible ignorance of how Earth System “works” may very result in engaging in actions that simply *intensify* our problems rather than *alleviating* them. In our hubris we may think that we know how to “fix” Earth System, but the “[pride goes before a fall](#)” principle applies not only in the realm of *personal* affairs, but on the larger scale of *Earth System* affairs—the difference being that in the latter case our very continuation as a species becomes a questionable matter.

AMEG may be correct in its statement that adaptation cannot “save” us, but I believe that adaptation is far less risky than are geo-engineering measures—and therefore continue to believe that (a) our “salvation”—*if* it can be achieved—lies in adaptation, with (b) movement in a eco-communitarian direction being the best adaptation course (see Section 5 in my [A Religion for Today](#)).

## Endnotes

1. The mission of AMEG, as they state it, is as follows:

Our mission is **PROTECTION**.

Our mission is to warn the world that the Arctic and the Earth are in a state of dire emergency and that only immediate drastic action can save us from catastrophe. We have no time left.

This planet Earth is a sacred trust we hold for all future generations of humanity and all species.

2. Now, those lacking a control mentality (i.e., those forced to be submissive relative to those with a control mentality) needed at least to adopt a control *stance* relative to the environment to survive.
3. Is this to *compensate* for the former lack? How dare I ask such a question!

## **The Other Major Threat**

Alton C. Thompson

Chris Hedges has recently [noted](#), correctly, that:

A handful of corporate oligarchs around the globe have everything—wealth, power and privilege—and the rest of us struggle as part of a vast underclass, increasingly impoverished and ruthlessly repressed. There is one set of laws and regulations for us; there is another set of laws and regulations for a power elite that functions as a global mafia.

His solution:

Rebel. Even if you fail, even if we all fail, we will have asserted against the corporate forces of exploitation and death our ultimate dignity as human beings. We will have defended what is sacred. Rebellion means steadfast defiance. It means resisting just as have Bradley Manning and Julian Assange, just as has **Mumia Abu-Jamal**, the radical journalist whom **Cornel West**, **James Cone** and I visited in prison last week in Frackville, Pa. It means refusing to succumb to fear. It means refusing to surrender, even if you find yourself, like Manning and Abu-Jamal, caged like an animal. It means saying no. To remain safe, to remain “innocent” in the eyes of the law in this moment in history is to be complicit in a monstrous evil.

As much as I admire [Chris Hedges](#) and his writings, and feel his frustration with the modern world (here in the United States in particular), I am forced to ask myself: Just what can rebellion be expected to accomplish? In particular, can it be expected to help our species *survive*?

I noted in an essay that I wrote earlier today (“[Geo-Engineering vs. Adaptation](#)”) that a *control mentality* can be identified as the fundamental cause of most of our problems today, including that of global warming—with the additional problem today that the *solution* that some are suggesting today for the problem of global warming *itself* involves a control mentality! I would add that if this latter fact can easily go unnoticed—because we tend not to think of science *per se* as involving a control mentality, given that *individual scientists* seem to be innocent on this score—*corporate control* of our food supply *also* involves a control mentality (obviously!), and is co-equal as a threat with global warming to our continued existence.

Andrea Germanos has recently written an [important article](#) on this latter topic, pointing out, for example, that:

- At the Seventh Trondheim (Norway) Conference on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Chairman Zakri Abdul Hamid said “we are hurtling towards irreversible environmental tipping points that, once passed, would reduce the ability of ecosystems to provide essential goods and services to humankind.”

- Crops have suffered a loss of 75 percent of genetic diversity in the last century as locally-adapted varieties were abandoned in favor of genetically uniform varieties.
- Executive director of [Seed Savers Exchange](#) John Torgrimson states that “at one time, we had 20,000 varieties of apples in the U.S.” In 2000, we had about 4,000 varieties, but most of those were held in private orchards across the country; market forces are bringing only a handful of varieties to consumers.
- We need genetic diversity, Zakri said, because it is key to providing “a large genetic pool that enables organisms to withstand and adapt to new conditions.”
- Agribusiness firms are primarily responsible for the loss of genetic diversity that has been occurring. “In their relentless push for market control these corporations, Monsanto, Syngenta and others, often with help from governments, have monopolized and privatized our seed supply—and promoted monoculture farming that has destroyed soils and fed climate change and drought,” says [Christopher] Cook.[1] “Biodiversity and economic diversity are linked—to restore both, we must combat agri-food corporations’ phenomenal economic and political power.”

We are fortunate that an organization such as Seed Savers Exchange exists. However, that organization is *adapting* to a problem that exists, not *addressing* the problem—the growing control over our food supply by large agri-business firms.

Chris Hedges—who has shown no awareness of this problem (so far as agri-business firms, specifically, are concerned)—might argue that the answer is to “rebel.” But what I have tried to make clear is that although rebellion may help reduce one’s level of frustration and satisfy certain psychological needs, what rebellion actually amounts to is “[fiddlin’ while Rome burns](#).”

I certainly would not discourage efforts to gain some control [2] over large agri-business firms, but because I believe it essential to recognize the dire straits that we are in (it being virtually *certain* that the “safe” increase of 2° C. in the global mean temperature will be crossed within a matter of decades), I believe the wisest course to be that of trying to adapt to the changes that will inevitably be occurring, doing so by following the eco-communitarian option (that I have been “harping” on in my essays!).

## Endnotes

1. Cook is the author of [Diet for a Dead Planet: Big Business and the Coming Food Crisis](#) (New York: The New Press, 2006).
2. Please excuse me for using that word here!



## **The Leadership We Need?**

Alton C. Thompson

“We do not see a viable pathway with any known technology today to achieve the 350 outcome that is not devastating to economies, societies and peoples’ health and well-being around the world,” he said.

“So the real question is, do you want to keep arguing about that and pursuing something that cannot be achieved at costs that will be detrimental? Or do you want to talk about what’s the path we should be on and how do we mitigate and prepare for the consequences as they present themselves?”

So [said](#) Rex Tillerson, CEO of ExxonMobil Corporation, at a recent shareholders’ meeting.

(His reference to a “350 outcome” was, of course, an allusion to the [fact that](#) “350 parts per million [ppm] is what many scientists, climate experts, and progressive national governments are now saying is the safe upper limit for CO<sub>2</sub> in our atmosphere”—a fact that [Bill McKibben](#) has used in establishing the <http://350.org/> web site. An ironic fact, I should add, given that the [400 ppm](#) mark has been passed—a fact that the [Cato Institute](#) [1] suggests is [good for plants](#), and therefore good for us humans as well!)

The argument that Mr. Tillerson seems to have been presenting at the meeting in question is:

- It’s true that global warming is occurring—I will not deny that.
- That problem has a *technological* solution.
- There is, however, no known technology at present which, if implemented immediately, would prevent the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere from ceasing to rise from its current level (350 ppm—an erroneous number, as I’ve indicated)—without, that is, being “devastating to economies,” etc. [2]
- Given this, the wise course of action is to wait until “consequences” (of what level of significance, and of what types?) “present themselves,” and *then* begin to ask ourselves what mitigation activities we need to engage in.

The fact that Mr. Tillerson is the CEO of a major corporation implies that he has some level of intelligence and education, but his *comments* suggest at the very least that he is badly informed. Given that he leads an organization that is expected—by its shareholders—to maximize profits,

and that his own salary is dependent on that fact, it is understandable why he would give those two factors some weight in his decision-making, and in his comments on the firm for which he works. The question that arises about him, however, is: Has he so sheltered himself from the findings of climate scientists that he is not aware, e.g., that:

- The majority of climate scientists are in agreement that a 2° C. increase in the global mean temperature (since, say, 1750 CE) is the “safe” upper limit of increase (after which, a rapid increase is to be expected, along with an intensification of the various atmospheric phenomena associated with the warming—such as weather conditions becoming ever more erratic).
- An increase of 0.8° C. has occurred *already*, and the greenhouse gases in the atmosphere at the present time are enough—without any further additions—to produce a *further* increase of somewhere between 1° C. and 1.6° C.

Theoretically, geo-engineering measures could be implemented that would remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, thereby averting catastrophe. But such measures would involve the same hubris that got us into our current predicament, and could very well cause unanticipated problems that would be *even more* devastating than global warming (see pp. 80-81 in [this](#)).

The control mentality that seems to dominate our leaders—in both government and (especially) the economy—and which is leading us down the wrong path is one that is an integral part of the Existing Order. What that means is that so long as the Existing Order exists, so will that mentality.

It is foolish to think that our leaders will suddenly change their mode of thinking; and *that* fact means that they will continue to lead us in the wrong direction—until disaster occurs. If they *do* change their mode of thinking when “consequences” become impossible to ignore, it will be too late. In fact, it is even too late *now*—for the “die has been cast” in the sense that the greenhouse gases currently in the atmosphere are likely to cause societies to collapse within a few decades, with a severe culling of the world’s population occurring before, during, and after that occurs.

It is difficult for some of us to comprehend why people like Mr. Tillerson are unable to recognize that their fixation on next quarter’s profits—rooted, as they are, in the assumption that their firm’s activities are somehow independent of the Earth Ecosystem—represents a sort of mental illness. A [psychosis](#) for which one is rewarded handsomely, when it *should* result in commitment to a mental institution! But, then, we do not live in a [sane society](#), do we.

There *is* no good answer to the “fix” that we are in currently; but as I have argued in previous essays, efforts—initiated as soon as possible—to adapt to the changes that will inevitably be occurring would seem to offer the most promise.

## Endnotes

1. It's [position on global warming](#) is that "Although there are many different legislative proposals for substantial reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, there is no operational or tested suite of technologies that can accomplish the goals of such legislation.

Fortunately, and contrary to much of the rhetoric surrounding climate change, there is ample time to develop such technologies, which will require substantial capital investment by individuals.

2. Tillerson seems to hint here that technologies *do* exist at present (without, though, identifying them) which, if implemented, could halt increases in the ppm level, but that their implementation would result in "devastating economies," etc.